The **future** of **electronic entertainment** issue#113

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DoA Xtreme Beach
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Games as art, Mile Hi
Attack of the Mutant



Cashing in: Will licences and sequels kill videogame



enter

The future of electronic entertainment



Sheer coincidence, naturally, but as this editorial is being typed an email announcing a karting title incorporating the Popeye licence arrives in **Edge**'s inbox. And it's not the inappropriateness of the genre, potential brand apathy within target demographic or the market saturation by similar titles that instantly grates. It's the realisation of just how widespread, how desperate the search for intellectual property has become.

Greed is universal, of course. Smaller publishers finding it increasingly difficult to compete with the Ferraris and Williamses of this industry simply scrap over whichever drops remain after the big boys have made their licensing refuelling pit stop.

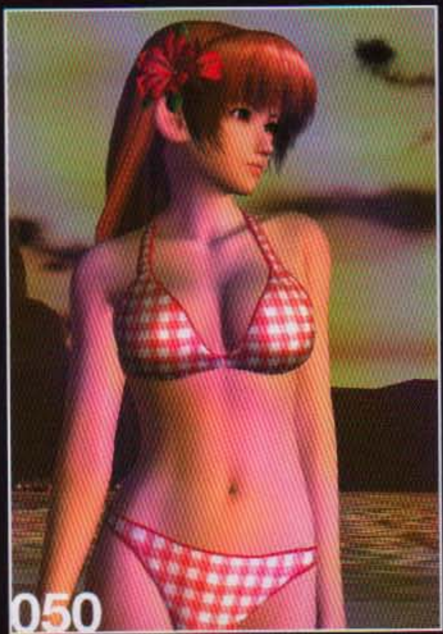
It's not a clever strategy. In fact, it's worryingly short-termist. As RedEye points out this month, seducing the mainstream by spending your budget on securing a particular logo to adorn game packaging rather than use it to strengthen development may well offer quick returns. But provide this audience with a bad or derivative gaming experience and it won't be back for the sequel (or indeed any other game). You've lost them for at least a hardware generation. Possibly for ever. And it's no good then turning to the hardcore for support – they'll be sufficiently well informed to ensure they avoid your 'products'.

In principle, **Edge** isn't against licences. In practice, for every *GoldenEye* countless *Tomorrow Never Dies* ruin the party for everyone: trust must be regained; we're suddenly back at the last save point.

Originality, once the very essence of videogaming, has shot straight to the top of this industry's most endangered species list. Thankfully, as this month's lead news points out, at least some individuals seem prepared to do something about funding creativity. Because if the current situation doesn't alter expeditiously, our pastime may well join that list.



Features











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The Future Network plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FNET)

Tel: +44 1225 442244

EDGE

Bath London Milan New York Paris San Francisco

Printed in the UK

ABC 30,118 (Audit Bureau of Circulation)

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Distributed through the UK newstrade by **Sey**
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Having trouble finding **Edge**? **Tom Shaw** 012

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directory august

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Production of Edge
Hardware: Power Macintosh G3, G4
Software: QuarkXPress, Adobe Photoshop, Macromedia *FreeHand*, and Microsoft Office **Typography:** (Adobe®) Helvetica: [illegible], Thin, Light, Roman, **Medium**, **Bold**

Printed in the UK by TPL Printers Ltd, Hartlebury, Worcs

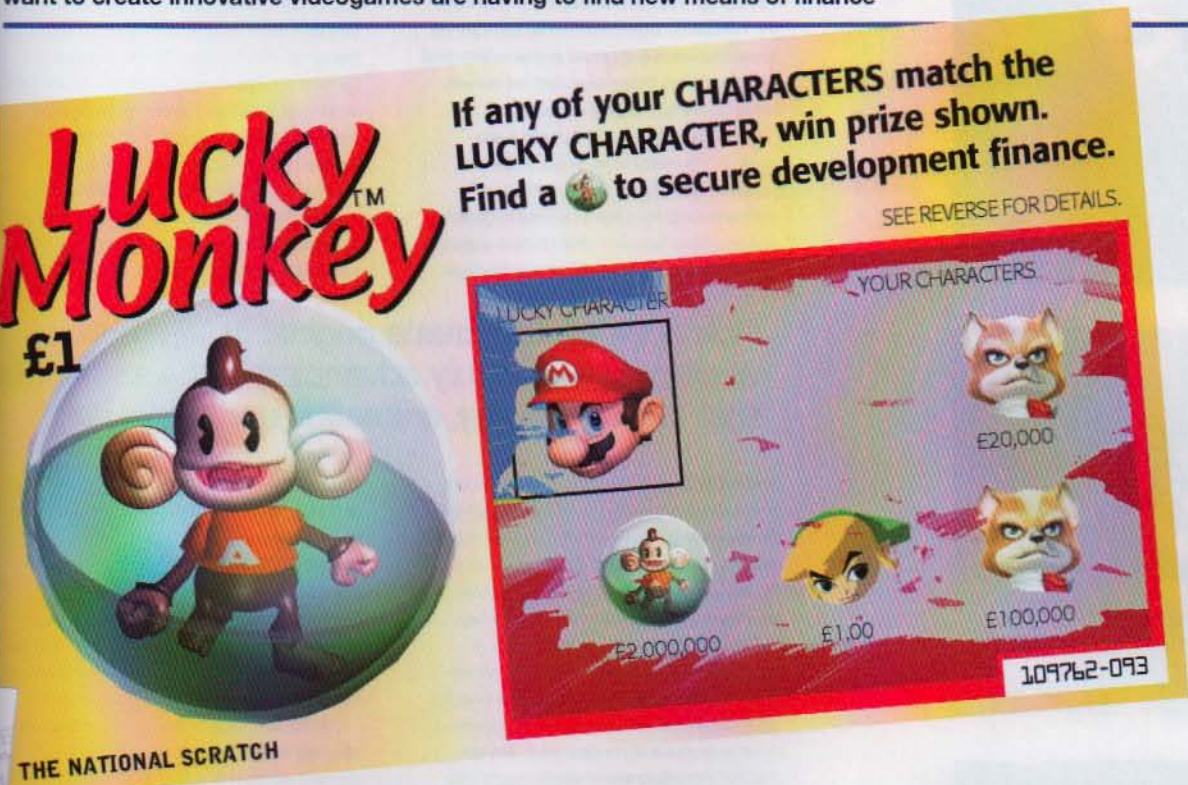
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"Why did they get rid of the fighting – it's the best part of the old version."
"I think kids were hitting each other or something, man."
"But you know what, Mike? I think you can make their heads bleed on this one."


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Raising the stakes in the funding lottery

With risk-averse publishers preoccupied by licences and sequels, developers who want to create innovative videogames are having to find new means of finance





CAPITAL ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

With publishers increasingly risk-averse, CEG boasts a fund of around $40–50m to spend on developing original content, but also a wealth of experience with which to assist in management matters – like high-profile ex-Microsoft employees, Seamus Blackley and Kevin Bachus

Yet again a spate of recent research and statistics suggests that the videogame industry is currently enjoying a fertile period of rude health, banishing memories of a difficult transition period. Last month, figures released by research agency, Informa, suggested that the global games market will be worth $31bn (£20bn) this year, with software sales expected to reach $12bn (£8bn). This rosy picture of the industry is backed up by research undertaken by trade paper, 'MCV', which indicates that UK marketing spend by the top ten publishers will reach £100m in 2002 – representing a twofold increase over last year's expenditure.

Paradoxically though, these figures coincide with a profusion of bad news for individual publishers and developers. Rage, for example, recently narrowly averted a financial crisis by securing additional funding from the capital markets, and as **Edge** goes to press it still intends to cut 30 per cent of its workforce. Infogrames has had to make redundancies in its Sheffield studio, while Funcom has also been forced into layoffs. Meanwhile Konami has closed its Redwood City office, and UK developer Red Lemon has gone to the wall. 'MCV' even reports that some publishers are failing to make milestone payments.

All this after an E3 at which the abundance of sequels, franchises and licences demonstrated unprecedented heights of publisher risk-aversion. As Durlacher's **Nick Gibson** puts it, "High risk products are not high on the priorities of most publishers at the moment. Most see profitability coming from sequels and derivative products, because these are safe bets. If you look at EA, over 50 per cent of its turnover comes from sequels, franchises and licences that it can reproduce on an annual basis." While it might be going too far to compare the present situation with previous licensing booms that have heralded downswings in the fortunes of the industry, it is fair to say that without an injection of innovation, there's a significant chance that consumers may become jaded by an incestuous spiral of diminishing IP.

Work for hire

Risk-averse publishers, under pressure from investors to deliver predictable streams of revenue and facing mounting development costs, are investing in a smaller number of more bankable projects. Developers are being asked to do work for hire, but very few are being allowed to generate original titles.

"The development industry in Europe has undergone considerable proliferation, creating an oversupply at a time of narrowing demand," explains Gibson. "So the process of pitching to a publisher has increased from two or three months to six to eight months. Since the average cost of development has always been on the rise, publishers are devoting an increasing portion of their development investment towards a smaller number of development projects, and because they need to manage their financial risk better, they are having to look at the more financially stable, larger, developers."

Consequently, developers are struggling. Although there are several ways of funding the creation of a new title, relying on a publisher providing an advance on royalties is by far the most common. Companies such as Kuju, Argonaut and Warthog have found that capital equity markets provide easy access to capital, as well as enabling acquisitive strategies, but such an approach is not without a downside – as companies such as Rage and Kalisto can attest. Aside from equity investors, the only other viable alternatives for developers have been securing a loan or self-financing using profits from previous titles – neither of which



Shahid Ahmad, of Start Games, also recognises the fundamental shortcomings in the traditional publisher/developer funding model

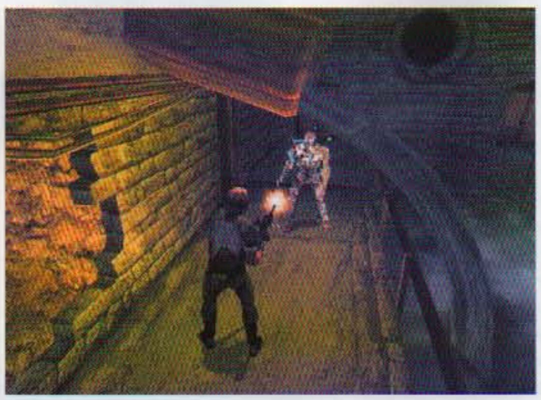
Generic Licences

Exemplifying the current trend for generic product (from top): *Robocop*, *Star Wars Bounty Hunter*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Terminator: Dawn of Fate*









guarantees the industry with a stable source of original content. And while trade organisations TIGA and ELSPA are lobbying the government for a favourable tax regime, and middleware and increasingly effective outsourced services lessen the increase in development costs, there are still some deep-seated structural problems that need to be overcome if consumers and the industry are to benefit from original content.

"Fundamentally there has been a gap created in the past couple of years between publishers and independent development companies that have limited access to capital, and as a result have an inability to take a game further than concept or basic prototype stage," continues Gibson. "This is because publishers are increasingly unwilling to undertake high-risk development, so they're starting to want to see product at a later stage of development. It's virtually impossible now to sell a game based on a concept; you have to invest a lot of money, time and effort into creating a prototype. A significant number of independent developers don't have the resources to do this. So there's a gap between the willingness of publishers to invest in products at concept stage and the inability or unwillingness of developers to take products beyond concept stage."

Joint venture

Fortunately, though, there are some elements within the industry that are seeking to bridge this gap. Start Games is typical of a number of funds being set up to invest specifically in developers. It's a joint venture between talent management agency ICM, communications and media group Telewest and business concept developer Extreme Finance, which includes industry stalwart Les Edgar on its board as a non-executive director. "What we're about is funding that tricky prototype or preproduction phase," explains managing director, **Shahid Ahmad**. "Getting developers to create a demo so we can go to a publisher and put a controller in a publisher's hand so that if they like it they can buy it. We want to help create original IP. We're sick of gameplay not truly advancing at the same rate that the technology, animation and audio are. We also wanted to bridge the widening gap between developers and publishers. Developers want to chase dreams. What publishers want to do is see a return on their investment. That's the bottom line."

Unlike conventional venture capital firms, which would expect a stake in the company in return for financing development, Start provides more than just money. "Some of the new funds that are being set up, are actually just capital exercises – they're not creativity exercises, they're not about getting original content out there. They're about funding deals that already exist. Most of them just want to bankroll the development of a game that's already been signed up. Which is good for the developer, because they get more royalties at the back enc and it's good for the publisher, because they don't have to worry about horrible looking balance sheets. But it's not really good for creativity. What we're doing rewards creativity."

In order to do so, the company also assists in production management and makes several software packages available for free, including

> "We want to help create original IP. We're sick of gameplay not truly advancing at the same rat that the technology, animation and audio are"

Renderware, Maya and NXN's Alienbrain. "Look at *GTAIII*," continues Ahmad. "The guys didn't even use source code, which just shows how irrelevant it is. We're not interested in the technology, just make it fun, that's what the developer has got to concentrate on. We don't say you have to use Renderware, but it's a majo plus to us if you can, because you can be up ar running with a demo in three or four weeks."

At the end of the prototype stage, Start will also help its developers to pitch their proof of concept directly to a publisher. "The idea is to appeal to all sections of a publisher – PR, marketing, sales, development, execs, VPs – sc there's a little bit of documentation for everyone and a playable demo as well." Not that every prototype financed by Start will be destined for success. "All we're about is making proofs of concept," continues Ahmad. "They won't all succeed; some of them will get canned. But some of them will prove a concept that the publishers did not have the bottle to support. We're willing to take some of the risk because we think we can pick, and if we can't we're out of business."

On its own, Start's approach isn't a panace there are still inherent problems in the publisher/developer relationship that inhibit creativity, as Ahmad concedes. "We're not offering a complete solution, but we're hoping that we can work with others to provide the complete solution – a fully funded game, all the way through to completion, where the develope gets a better cut and the publisher doesn't hav to act like a bank."

Reassuringly, Start isn't alone in wanting to do something about an industry careering dangerously close to stagnation. Another company that is attempting to foster the creativity that is essential to sustain the long-ter future of the industry is Capital Entertainment Group. Set up by **Gene Mauro**, Mark Hood an

high-profile ex-Microsoft employees, Kevin Bachus and Seamus Blackley, it's unsurprisingly already benefited from much publicity. Indeed Sega has already announced that it will be the company's first publishing partner, taking on the marketing and distribution of its first two titles. Based partially on Hollywood production studios, it's another fund that provides more than just finance, though Mauro is keen to distinguish the company from prototype funds such as Start.

"There are a few funds popping up (Start Games, Fund4Games, IFinance, WiseMonkey) that will pay for the development of prototypes in order to help sell a game to a publisher," he declares. "We have some doubts about the long-term viability of those models because they do nothing to address the fundamental risk that, at the end of the day, is placed entirely on the publisher. There's a big difference between building a prototype in order to make a sale and building a game and it's not always easy to make the transition from one development style to another once the sale is made. Similarly, of course, the model assumes the publisher can just step in and pick up management of the game's development, with no disruption of the developer's processes, and get the game to completion." In contrast, CEG's approach is to fully fund a game through to completion, providing financial assistance, but also, crucially, assistance with production management.

"Our greatest value has less to do with our funding than it does with the creative and managerial expertise we can apply to helping games achieve their full potential," argues Mauro. "Because this is a creative endeavour, the success of our investment relies heavily on CEG's ability to select and manage each property by hand. Making sure that each game sells as well as it can when it's released is paramount and can only be accomplished through close collaboration with our developers." For this reason, the company aims to work on around six hand-picked projects a year.

"We go out and meet with development companies around the world who have fresh, exciting ideas that they're passionate about. We select the ones that we think have the potential to break new ground and to strike a chord with gamers. We work closely with the developer to help them achieve that full potential – both creatively (making the most of art, technology, gameplay, etc) and logistically (tracking day-to-day progress relative to schedules, budgets and bug reports). Unlike many publishers, we don't have many of the financial pressures that lead sometimes to rush a game to market. But we do have an obligation to be mature and professional in our approach to development since we're spending our own money."

But by spending its own money, Mauro argues, everybody benefits. "We are forging a new model in the game industry that generates value for all our partners: publishers, developers, the financial community and the consumer." A larger profit share allows developers to be paid more money, sooner, while publishers benefit from reduced exposure to front-loaded development costs. The company also intends to take out completion bonds (which is essentially a means of financial insurance) halfway through the development process to cover its own risk, at which point the game will also be pitched to publishers. "But we're not looking to *sell* it to the publisher," stresses Mauro. "We're just looking for them to commit to distributing the game and setting aside a proper budget to market it. We still pay for all the costs of development out of our own pockets, and we never pass those costs on to the publisher. As a result, the publisher's risk is about half what it would be if they were producing the game themselves."

Original content

Which, of course, provides a solution to the problem of risk-averse publishers. Because if the industry is to maintain its current commercial momentum, original content is essential. Publishers simply can't afford to carry on producing sequels and licences that do little to sustain long-term consumer interest. "Look back over the past several years of our industry's history and I'll bet the games that stick out in your mind – the games that sold exceptionally well – were games that were fresh, exciting and original at the time," argues Mauro.

"Think back to *Castle Wolfenstein* and *Doom* (which created the FPS genre) or *Dune 2* (which established the RTS). Or the first *Tomb Raider* (which was initially rejected by Sony when Eidos presented the concept). Or the first *Tony Hawk* game. Look at the success of *The Sims* (which took four years to get off the ground). Even *Grand Theft Auto III* – which, while technically a sequel, broke new ground, set a new standard of quality and reinvented the franchise. Consumers are absolutely demanding more original content. But there are fewer and fewer original games to satisfy that demand, and to set the example. Retailers are demanding more original content. Platform holders are demanding more original content. Publishers are demanding more original content. Developers are demanding more original content. It's the only way to move the industry forward. But they're demanding it in a way that makes good business sense."

And while companies like CEG and Start aren't guaranteed to be a success – particularly because they depend on their ability to pick games that combine creative and commercial success – they do make good business sense. They may not get rid of other obstacles to artistic endeavour, such as retail monopolies causing distribution bottlenecks, but they may yet prove to be a much-needed remedy to the damaging impact of the industry's notorious cyclical downswings. And if they are a success, they could fundamentally alter the development value chain.

Joie de vivre

And a few examples of what publishers should aspire towards (from top): *Super Monkey Ball 2*, *GoldenEye*, *Grand Theft Auto III*, *Pillage*









Piracy in the playground

If the future of gaming is in the hands of children, then something had better be done about the problem of piracy in schools. And soon





Among the teenagers Edge spoke to, most buy or sell software for around £2. High retail prices rather than profit making is the motivation for such activity

ELSPA is trying to get tough on software piracy. In 2001 some 688 raids were conducted around the country with almost 37,000 CDs seized. But the problem of software piracy will not go away. ELSPA's annual estimate for revenues lost to the industry through software piracy came in at £3 billion for 2001. Investigators all over the country (half ex-police, half Trading Standards officers) are literally kicking in doors to bring unscrupulous bootleggers to justice. But there's a more insidious problem at the heart of the issue: teenage software pirates. Ever since the days of *007 Spy* – the Spectrum favourite – piracy in the playground has been on the increase.

"We know it's rife," admits **John Hillier**, ELSPA's anti-piracy unit manager. "Some pupils go to the lengths of turning it into a commercial enterprise. When I was in Trading Standards I saw situations where they were flogging games to friends in a kind of bedroom industry. Mates could even make orders. It is just utterly impossible to cover every area of piracy."

But what can be done about the situation? "We do from time to time get reports from Crime Stoppers and people ring us up on the piracy hotline number. But we are not going to prosecute children. When we get these reports our investigators go along to the school and give a talk in assembly." And is an assembly speech likely to make a difference? "We feel education is better than prosecution. The Patents Office is also producing an interactive computer disk that highlights issues of intellectual property theft in a very simple and effective way. This will actually be part of the National Curriculum with the new Citizenship subject from September. It will have a specific games component."

Pocket pirates

In reality, software piracy in the playground is rampant. It's not difficult to see why. According to Wall's Authoritative Survey on British Pocket Money 2001, the majority of children receive no more than £3 a week, with paper rounds or similar employment only increasing this by about £5. **Edge** interviewed 50 pupils who owned either a PlayStation or PS2 in one typical UK comprehensive school. Of these, 46 said they'd played illegal copies in the last two years. Startlingly, less than ten per cent denied having owned pirated software before. "We don't have the kind of money you'd expect," says Iain, a 15-year-old student. "Even with a paper round you'd only be able to buy a game every few months. Games are a rip-off, and it is so much easier to just borrow a game off a mate and copy it."

The high price of games "encourages piracy and is stopping videogames breaking into the mass market. The industry needs to find a way to lower prices, which will reduce piracy"



Edge's investigation uncovered interesting attitudes among the nation's youth. Few said that they indulged in piracy for profit – it's simply a way to gain kudos and get the latest titles. "If they weren't so expensive, I doubt I'd copy games in the first place," says John. "To have the money we need to buy every game is a dream, so I would much prefer to spend £2 for a copied game than £40 for the legal option. If we're expected to buy original games, they should at least be a reasonable price."



Acceptance into the peer group and building an extensive library of games seer to be the motivating factors in software piracy among teenagers. Many said that th expenditure of setting up a piracy operatio is minimal: many pupils already have family PCs at home and it costs just £80 to purchase a CD writer. The purchase of on 'official' copy of a game often fuels the illeg copying of another five or six. "I just borrov games off my mate and copy them," Chris told **Edge**. "There isn't anything stopping me copying them, and it's so easy it make anybody buying the proper version look lik a fool for doing so."

Many pupils are openly cynical about the effect their nefarious activities are havir on the industry. Some say the £3 billion quoted by ELSPA is inflated – it's not how


Photography: Martin Thompson

much pirates are making, but the loss of revenue for each pirated disk sold. "You can buy ten copied games and a chip for £40," states Iain. "But they can't say they've just lost £400, because I wouldn't spend £400 for ten original games in the first place. The reason I copy games is to avoid the cost."

Arguably, piracy is prevalent in schools because there's almost no consequence. "If the offender persists then we will take some form of legal action," says Hillier. "But piracy in schools isn't a major issue, the main problem is with people who are trying to make money out of piracy." Since ELSPA has the powers to seize property and make arrests, it is a formidable anti-piracy organisation. Children can be prosecuted, but in a British court of law, this could end in adoption or sequestration to juvenile delinquency centres. "It is still illegal [for children to copy games], but we prefer to tackle it from an educational point of view," reiterates Hillier.

Price of piracy

Despite ELPSA's efforts the prevailing attitude among UK teenagers is that piracy is a perfectly reasonable way of obtaining software. Nearly every teenager **Edge** spoke to was adamant that the reason they pirate games is because of the high retail costs, not so they could make a tidy profit. Few felt any guilt about owning or copying pirated games.

"Piracy, from whatever source, is decimating the market, and yet the industry is simply turning a blind eye," argues **Charles Cecil**, managing director of Revolution Software. He is also outspoken about the high price of games. "This encourages piracy and is stopping videogames breaking into the true mass market. The industry needs to find a way to lower prices, which will reduce piracy and broaden the market. Since development costs account for less than ten per cent of the revenues from a videogame, the real solution is to reduce the margins made by retailers, publishers or the format holders."

There is no simple answer to the problem of piracy. However, **Edge**'s (admittedly small) survey suggests that the nation's youth – and next generation of console gamers – has a worryingly laissez faire attitude to the problem. Meanwhile, ELSPA continues to target schools with its educational talks.

Microsoft's Japanese dream rests with Xbox Live

As Xbox continues to underperform, Microsoft reveals details of its Japanese online offering, while a hardware redesign is also rumoured to be on the way





The main thrust of the conference was the forthcoming autumn launch of the broadband Xbox Live service, which is to start beta testing in the summer

As part of a continued bid to inspire Japanese confidence in its console, Microsoft held an Xbox summer conference on June 11 at the Ebisu Hall in Tokyo. The conference outlined details of the Xbox Live offering in Japan, initially announced at E3, and followed similar events held in the winter and spring. But despite Microsoft's commitment to the region, the console is still struggling to gain mindshare. Hirohisa Ohura, CEO of Microsoft Japan, admitted as much at the conference, though he reasserted the company's dedication to achieving success in Japan.

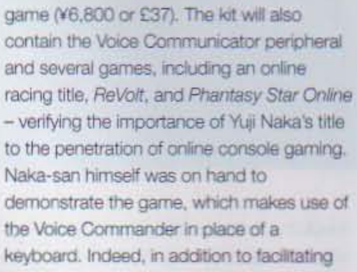
He went on to reveal the finer points of the Xbox Live service, confirming that it will be broadband only, with Xbox owners able to connect using any kind of ADSL, Cable or FTTH broadband environment. Although users will be able to connect via their existing ISP, the company also announced that it is to arrange a deal with an unnamed ISP for those who haven't already signed up with one. The service will commence beta testing in the summer, with a full launch to follow in the autumn.

It was also revealed that Japanese Xbox owners are set to benefit from a starter kit that will include a 12-month service subscription for the standard price of a game (¥6,800 or £37). The kit will also contain the Voice Communicator peripheral and several games, including an online racing title, *ReVolt*, and *Phantasy Star Online* – verifying the importance of Yuji Naka's title to the penetration of online console gaming. Naka-san himself was on hand to demonstrate the game, which makes use of the Voice Commander in place of a keyboard. Indeed, in addition to facilitating live chat it also enables voice alteration, with a choice of several types of voices to suit your character.





Microsoft's Japanese conference gave the company a post-E3 opportunity to show off Sega's imminent Xbox title, Smilebit's *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, to its native audience



Japanese subscribers to Xbox Live will benefit from a starter pack that includes a Voice Commander peripheral as well as several complete titles – Sonic Team's *PSO* included

Well developed

Microsoft was keen to emphasise, though, that its online service will also be supported by a significant number of developers, and Sammy, Sims, Banpresto and Yamasa Entertainment were all announced as new Xbox developers. Sega maintained its support for the platform, with Amusement Vision's Toshihiro Nagoshi announcing *Spikeout X-treme* on the platform, based on the networked arcade version with updated graphics. Other big name announcements included Capcom's *Dino Crisis 3* and online *Tekki* and in total, it was revealed that 47 Xbox Live titles are being developed by 39 developers.

Although Microsoft didn't make any announcement at the press conference, rumours have also reached **Edge** that an upgraded version of the Xbox is currently in development. Although the company isn't planning to release an outright sequel just yet, it is conscious of the fact that the bulky size of the console is an impediment to its uptake in Japan, while a reduced manufacturing cost may also enable the company to meet its desired price point of $100.

According to **Edge**'s sources, the redesigned hardware will include as many of the console's silicon components as possible sitting on a shared die, though the console's hard drive may prove to be a stumbling block. Apparently the redesigned hardware is scheduled for the end of the year, or early 2003, though other rumours report that a hybrid Personal Video Recorder/Xbox is also in the pipeline.

Sega's arcade show dominated by Virtua Fighter

Coin-op specialist unveils Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution and reveals hardware diversification ahead of JAMMA





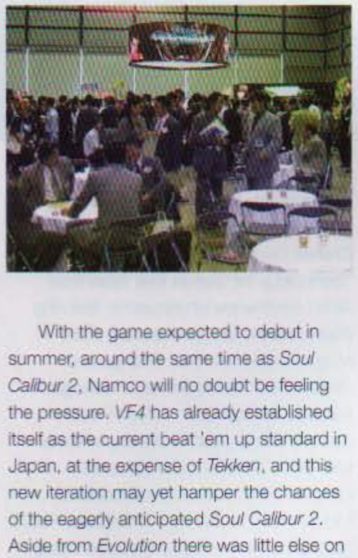
Sega's decision to focus attention towards *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* was more than justified, with significant interest – and indeed orders – from Japanese arcade vendors

Sega held its annual private arcade show on June 11, south of Tokyo in Kamata. It's an event that the company has traditionally used to complement the major coin-op trade shows, AOU in March and JAMMA in September, demonstrating the development progress of games that have been announced at AOU and are set to be properly unveiled at JAMMA – allowing Sega to generate interest and orders from arcade vendors. Although there were no major surprises this year, Sega did reveal its commitment to several different arcade technology platforms, and development subsidiary AM2 unveiled its recently announced addition to the *Virtua Fighter* series, *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution*.

Perhaps unexpectedly, *Evolution* was looking complete, despite incorporating so many new features that it is almost a sequel rather than an upgrade. Running on Naomi2 hardware, it features all the characters and arenas from the original *VF4*, as well as several new ones – giving an insight as to what *Virtua Fighter 5* might look like.

New moves

The major addition is that two new fighters have been introduced – Goh, who fights with a Judo style, and Brad, a kick boxer – but the original cast of characters has also been redesigned and given new sets of moves. An expanded singleplayer mission mode makes use of DoCoMo's VF Net service, and spectacular realtime weather effects round out a package that Sega-AM2 reckons to have achieved as much as is possible using existing hardware, suggesting that *VF5* is to run on the next iteration of Naomi technology.



With the game expected to debut in summer, around the same time as *Soul Calibur 2*, Namco will no doubt be feeling the pressure. *VF4* has already established itself as the current beat 'em up standard in Japan, at the expense of *Tekken*, and this new iteration may yet hamper the chances of the eagerly anticipated *Soul Calibur 2*. Aside from *Evolution* there was little else on display. The usual line-up of *Derby Owners Club* titles and Mahjong cabinets were shown off, and Sega Rosso demonstrated its forthcoming surfing title, *Soul Surfer*.

But the main announcement was that despite sluggish sales of coin-ops, Sega is committed to supporting four arcade platforms with future titles. Apart from the Naomi platform, the company is also developing for the TriForce board, designed in conjunction with Nintendo and Namco; the Chihiro board, based upon Xbox architecture (and likely home of Sega-AM2's next-gen version of *OutRun*); and System X, co-developed with Sammy.





Aside from *Evolution*, the main highlight was Sega Rosso's *Soul Surfer*, though a Mahjong cabinet was also introduced, alongside football games and horse racing titles

CUTTINGS



FFXI teething troubles

In what is hardly an auspicious start for Sony's planned PlayStation2 online services, Square's *Final Fantasy XI* continues to be bedevilled by problems. After its May launch day was plagued by server crashes and registration difficulties, the company recently had to close down its PlayOnline servers in order to fix bugs and implement the game's first major patch, while news has also emerged that the game is incompatible with certain models of PlayStation2. These problems compound the stock shortages of hard drive units that have hampered the uptake of the *FFXI*. Hopefully the recently commenced beta testing for the PC version of the game will be more successful. The PlayStation2 version of *Final Fantasy XI* will be released in Europe in 2003.

Xbox problems

Meanwhile, Microsoft's woes also continue, with chip maker Cirrus Logic warning of a revenue shortfall because of slack Xbox production. The company announced that quarterly revenues could fall as much as 16 per cent below previous estimates due to lower than expected sales to Thomson Multimedia, the manufacturer of the Xbox DVD drive – though Thomson denied a shortfall of orders. Consequently, shares in companies that make Xbox-related hardware fell, including nVidia, Flextronics, Intel and Texas Instruments.

BAFTA call for entries

BAFTA has announced a call for entries for its fifth annual Interactive Entertainment Awards. Although the deadline for general entries has now passed, entries for games categories are being held open until August 5. This year will see five categories dedicated to videogames: Games – Sports; Games – Mobile Device; Games – Multiplayer; Games – PC; and Games – Console. Previous winners include *Phantasy Star Online*, *Max Payne*, *Frequency* and *Shogun: Total War*. For more information email ieawards@bafta.org, or visit the event Website at http://www.bafta.org

GDCE details revealed

Mark Cerny is unveiled as a keynote speaker, as GDCE returns to provide a forum for Europe's development community



As announced last issue, this year's ECTS videogame expo, as well as featuring the prestigious **Edge** Award for Excellence in Development, will also see the introduction of a Consumer Area hosted by Sony. This dedicated area will run alongside the Trade Area, and in a bid to put an end to annual grumblings the event organisers have decided upon a move to the central London location of the Earls Court Exhibition Centre. The event, which takes place from August 29–31 will be preceded by the second annual Game Developers Conference Europe, which is to run from August 27–29. Still in its infancy, GDCE looks set to build on a positive start last year, with Mark Cerny recently announced as this year's keynote speaker.

Following in the footsteps of Phil Harrison and Masaya Matsuura, who gave the keynote addresses last year, Cerny is the founder of game design consultancy Cerny Games, and boasts a CV that tracks a long and illustrious career in the videogame industry. After starting out as the designer and programmer of 1982's Atari coin-op *Marble Madness*, he also worked on Sega's *Sonic 2* and as president of Universal Interactive Studios, oversaw the creation of the *Crash Bandicoot* and *Spyro the Dragon* series. His keynote address will preside over a dedicated development conference that will offer developers a chance to share knowledge, information, and inspiration, in a more Eurocentric environment than the original GDC, which is held annually in the US.

Organised by CMP Europe and the Gama Network, other scheduled events include: 'Choosing the Most Influential Game of All Time', a panel discussion presided over by 'Official PlayStation2 Magazine's Mike Goldsmith and featuring Charles Cecil, Jon Hare, and Phil Harrison; 'Technology for Games Five Years from Now', another panel discussion featuring David Braben, Demis Hassabis, Peter Molyneux and Jez San; 'Ratings and Censorship: Making Sense of Videogame Ratings Development'; 'Cross-Platform Console Development: Our Experiences with *Battle Engine Aquila*' by Jeremy Longley; 'Build or Buy: The Muddle of Middleware'; 'Getting the Right Data: Focus Testing *Halo*'; and 'Systemic Level Design for Emergent Gameplay' by Harvey Smith.

Other speakers include Capital Entertainment Group's Kevin Bachus, fresh from the challenge of developing the Xbox, Kuju Entertainment's Julian Davis, Jason Della Rocca of the IGDA, Rebellion's Jason Kingsley, Matthew Southern of the International Centre for Digital Content, and the BBFC's Gianni Zamo. And for the first time, this year's event will feature a series of tutorial sessions on August 27, sponsored by DirectX, Xbox and ATI. For online registration and full details of the conference programme, visit the event Website at http://www.gdceurope.com





Mark Cerny will be delivering the keynote speech at this year's GDCE at Earls Court

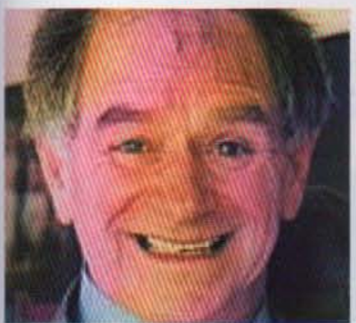


Jeremy Longley of Lost Toys will be among the speakers at Earls Court, offering a post-mortem of *Battle Engine Aquila*. Full details of the conference are on the event Website

But is it (narrative) art?

The Clerkenwell Literary Festival is to include a strand devoted to videogames and themes of 'play'

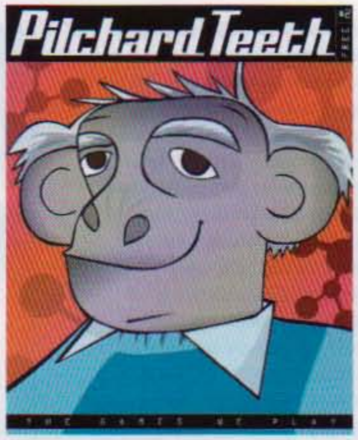
With its self-proclaimed mission to inject a bit of rock 'n' roll spirit into an otherwise staid literary scene, this year's Clerkenwell Literary Festival, which takes place from July 16–21, will be devoting its scholarly attention to videogames and exploring the theme of 'play'. Originally founded by Victoria Hull, this year's event is being organised by 'The Idler' and its PlayStation2-sponsored fanzine, 'Pilchard Teeth', who intend to uphold the festival's reputation for an imaginative and radical mix of mainstream and underground talent.



Edge columnist Steven Poole will be joined by Johnny Ball to discuss play

Taking place primarily at The Tardis Studios in London's Turnmill Street, this year's line-up of speakers and discussions includes a substantial dedication to the videogame form. Apart from ex-KLF member Bill Drummond posing the question 'Is God a Cunt?' there are several highlights among the events which have been confirmed. 'Play Time', for example, features the living legend, Johnny Ball, and Blur's Alex James alongside **Edge**'s own Steven Poole, in a discussion about the role of play in creativity, while 'Is Fatherhood the New Motherhood?' will give Will Self latitude to discuss liberty and paternity. Other play-related pursuits include a Celebrity Computer Games Pub Quiz and a celebration of the C64 music scene.

Of course, there will also be elements that are of a more strictly arty bent, such as jazz from Penny Rimbaud and a night dedicated to failure hosted by Toby Young, author of 'How To Lose Friends and Alienate People'. Other, more literary proceedings include 'The Writing of Bollywood' and poetry consequences, presented by the ubiquitous Keith Allen. Prices for events vary, but for up-to-date information, visit http://www.pilchardteeth.com or telephone 0207 691 0320.



This year's Clerkenwell Literary Festival is being organised by 'The Idler' and PlayStation2 fanzine, 'Pilchard Teeth'

CUTTINGS



Xbox Sonic?

Having kept quiet about the next chapter in the life of its blue-skinned mascot, Sonic Team has announced that details of the next game in the *Sonic* series will be revealed at the upcoming World Hobby Fair in Japan. With the event taking place on July 13–14, rumours suggesting that an Xbox version of the game is in the works, will have been confirmed or dismissed by the time this issue reaches you. Sega will also be demonstrating a playable version of *Super Monkey Ball 2* and offering a rare Chao download at the event.

Nintendo releases modem

Following Yamauchi-san's departure from his post as president of Nintendo, the company has announced a release date for a GameCube-compatible dial-up adaptor. Although a release date for the anticipated broadband adaptor has yet to be confirmed, the narrowband modem will be released in Japan on August 8, and will retail for ¥3,800 (£21). A European release date also has yet to be confirmed but the company did reveal that Sonic Team's *Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II* will be released on the same day.

TGS confirmed as Spaceworld cancelled

The organiser of the annual Tokyo Game Show, CES, has announced that this year's exhibition will take place from September 20–22 at the Makuhari Messe convention centre. Seventy-four companies have so far confirmed, including several major software publishers such as Sega, Capcom, Konami and Square. Meanwhile, Nintendo has announced that it will not be holding its Space World Show this year. Instead it will be holding a series of smaller public events.

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Armored Core 2: Another Age	PS2	Metro3D	From Software	8
Armored Core 3	PS2	From Software	In-house	8
DDR MAX: Dance Dance Revolution 6th Mix	PS2	Konami	In-house	8
MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology	Xbox/PC	THQ	Climax Brighton	8
Fatal Frame	PS2	Tecmo	In-house	7
Fireblade	PS2	Midway	Kuju Entertainment	6
Sega Soccer Slam	GC	Sega	Black Box/Visual Concepts	6
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	PC	Activision	Raven Software	6
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	PC/Xbox	Ubi Soft	Bethesda Softworks	6
V-Rally 3	PS2	Infogrames	Eden Studios	6
V-Rally 3	GBA	Infogrames	Fernando Velez and Guillaume Dubail	5



Armored Core 3



DDR MAX: Dance Dance Revolution 6th Mix



MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology



Fatal Frame

Graphical C change

nVidia's Cg programming language should make it easier for PC and Xbox developers to create high-end effects

http://www.cgshaders.org
http://developer.nvidia.com





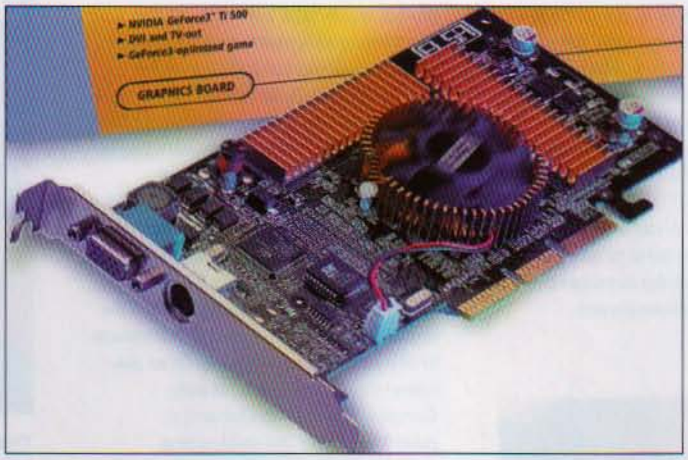
All these effects can be programmed in OpenGL or DirectX, of course, but Cg should make it easier for developers to gain access to them

According to nVidia's chief scientist **David Kirk**, the company's introduction of a new programming language for graphics, called Cg, is about making it easier for developers to create good-looking games. "Right now the problem is graphics hardware is so damn hard to program," he says.

To some extent though, this situation is nVidia's fault. Since it launched the GeForce family of graphics chips, its much vaunted six months hardware cycle has proved too fast to be supported by the two software application programming interfaces (APIs) used by game developers. Both Microsoft's Windows-oriented DirectX and the platform-independent OpenGL have struggled to provide game developers with the flexibility they need to take advantage of programmability unlocked by the next generation of graphics cards.

"We want to get developers programming at a higher level so they can focus on their creativity rather than spending time making the hardware work in realtime," Kirk evangelises. "At the moment, only the real rock star programmers can do great stuff. Everyone else struggles." Compared to the assembler-style code required to write the pixel and vertex shaders used to create the complex texture effects seen in games such as *Halo*, Cg promises to be more accessible and straightforward.

Code written in Cg can be compiled to a variety of platforms via DirectX 8 and OpenGL version 1.3. One of the main reasons Kirk gives for nVidia creating its own shader language is, as well as supporting Windows, it wants to encompass Mac OS X and Linux. Cg also supports Xbox.



nVidia's Cg should provide PC and Xbox developers with a language that is easy to program and with which they can generate complex surface effects

Wide release

But despite releasing the language itself, something which has caused controversy with other graphics hardware companies (see An alternative viewpoint), nVidia is keen to give Cg the widest possible release. Parts of the technology, including the parse for the compiler have been open-sourced. "I don't believe it's possible to own a programming language," says Kirk. Thirdparty software vendors including SoftImage, Alias|Wavefront and Discreet will also be supporting the language in their modelling packages.

At present, Cg is available as a public beta download, with additional features including the language spec, users' manual, libraries and sample code. "If a programmer knows how to program in C, they should be able to program their first Cg shader in less than a hour," Kirk says, predicting games using the language will be released before the end of the year; over 100 studios are already evaluating Cg. A full public release will follow in the summer, which will support the forthcoming DirectX 9 and OpenGL 1.4 APIs, as well as future hardware including nVidia's NV30.

An alternative viewpoint

With nVidia the 300-pound gorilla of the graphics card market, there has been no shortage of detractors for Cg. The most popular scare story is the claim that the nVidia-designed language will support nVidia hardware better than that of rivals such as ATI and 3Dlabs. "Everyone has a conspiracy theory," Kirk laughs. They think we are going to optimise nVidia GPUs and pessimise ATI GPUs but if you think about it, why is it good for us to make Cg work badly anywhere?"

Tim Lewis, marketing manager at 3Dlabs disagrees however. "It is unclear to us at this stage what benefit supporting Cg will offer to users of non-nVidia hardware," he says. 3Dlabs is annoyed because it is working on an initiative called OpenGL 2.0 which will expose programmable hardware within the OpenGL API. "Any final OpenGL 2.0 API that results from this initiative will be endorsed by the OpenGL ARB [the committee which oversees the standard] and the intellectual property and future development of the API would reside within the OpenGL ARB, not one vendor," Lewis points out.

Another cautionary note is provided by **Andrew Richards**, MD of Codeplay, which has developed VectorC, a C/C++ compiler for all game developers including those working on PlayStation2. "A lot of PC and Xbox developers are enthusiastic about Cg and rightly so, it's a good authoring tool for DirectX 8 shaders but these are the two least significant gaming platforms today," he says. "Cg is only appropriate to nVidia's current generation of hardware. It will become rapidly obsolete and need redesigning."



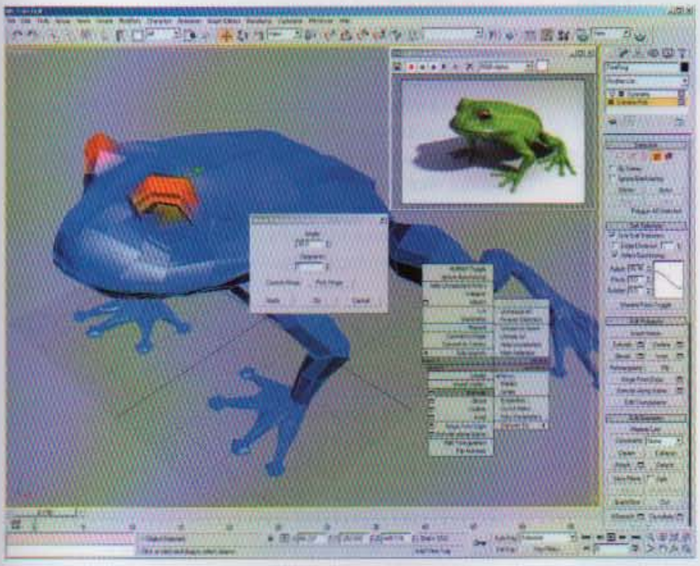


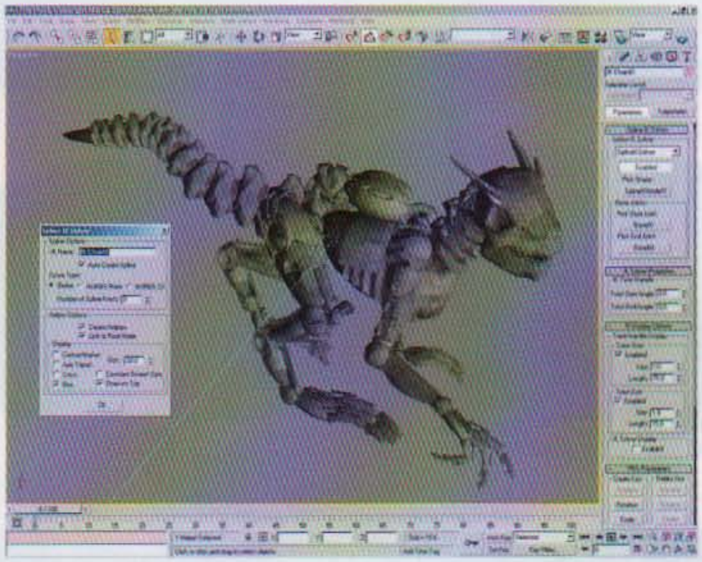
Shader effects vary from general lighting effects such as fresnel reflections and anisotropic lighting to more complex calculations such as matrix palette skinning

http://www.discreet.com

The next level of max

Discreet is improving the featureset of its industry-standard package 3ds max, as well as ensuring its pricing remains competitive









Plenty of extra polygon modelling tools are available, including the ability to extrude and connect edges, grow and shrink selections and constrain translation to edges and faces (top)

Following Alias|Wavefront's decision to slash the cost of its 3D modelling and animation package Maya (see **E**111), pricing rather than features has become the dominant driving force of the sector. The latest release of Discreet's 3ds max package, 3ds max 5, goes some way to redress the balance however. "It's a competitive market, but max is the leader with a registered user base of 160,000," says a confident **Nick Manning**, Discreet's animation manager. "With version 5 we're refining the market leader."

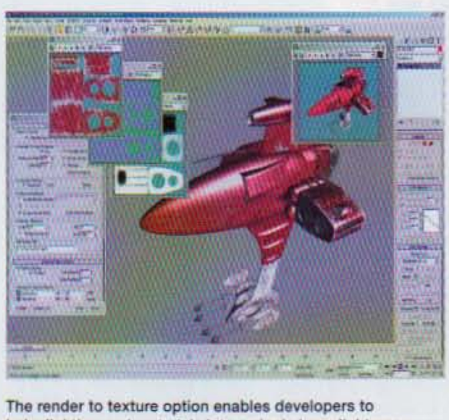
Major changes to the package's featureset for game developers include improvements to the polygon modelling, texturing and animation tools. But sensitivity to pricing has had an effect as well. Reactor, 3ds max's dynamics simulator developed by physics specialist Havok, will be bundled within the overall price. Previously it was available as a separate product, costing between £500 to £750. "We wanted 3ds max 5 to be an exceptional value product," says Manning. "Reactor hasn't sold in massive volumes, but we think it's a product that once developers get hold of it, they will use a lot."

Another full product, Lightscape, a 3D visualisation package for architectural and professional users is also bundled. To further encourage the loyalty of existing customers, floating licences for max are now available too, allowing developers to move their max licences from machine to machine, rather than having to shuffle artists between registered PCs. And plug-ins for 3ds max 4.2 will work on the new version out of the box. "For existing users we want the upgrade path to be as easy and attractive as possible," Manning confirms.

Feature comforts

But back to the features. There have been many workflow improvements to the package's polygonal modelling tools, which make it easier to build, connect and extend polygon meshes, particularly symmetrical ones. Additions to the animation tools include animation merging and spline-based inverse kinematics, to enhance modelling characters without a rigid bone structure. The UV unwrap tool automatically flattens 3D models, which makes them easier to texture, as well as minimising texture sizes. This is important when dealing with the limited texture memory for PlayStation2. Another carefully thought-out feature allows developers to automatically create lightmaps by baking static lighting generated from a 3D scene onto a texture. Also new is the realtime viewport for shaders, which supports both DirectX 8 and DirectX 9.

List pricing for the product is £2,695, with an upgrade from 3ds max 4 costing £595 or £995 from 3ds max 3. As Manning points out though, plenty of deals, particularly for bulk units are available. "We think that max is a competitive product even following the price cuts of rival packages," he says. "With max, you don't have to buy maintenance for example. But it's important to remember that the cost of buying a 3D package is small compared to the cost of employing an artist plus a workstation."



The render to texture option enables developers to bake lighting and materials into a single base lightmap

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE





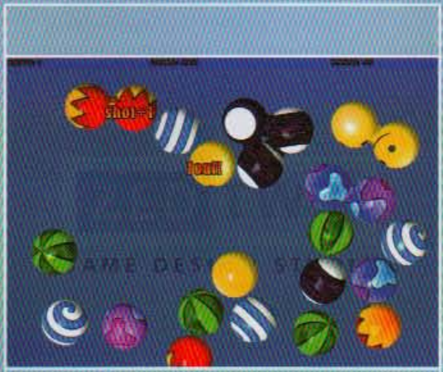


"Thanks **EDGE**!" said Mizuguchi-san when given his **Edge** Award. "What about an autograph?" we replied



Admittedly **Edge**'s haul isn't as big as some other attendees, but we did get this rather natty controller





For those of you reading this in black and white, the green striped ball is above the blue whirly one

01 E3 Tat Attack

US: Unfortunately there was no space last issue to show off **Edge**'s haul of E3 bounty, so we've had to hold it over for this issue. Now you too can see exactly what it is that sends the assembled mass of 'journalists' into the queuing, moaning, rapturous frenzy of freeloading desire that characterises the exhibition. Sadly, the recipient of Sony's micro-sized digital camera has since misplaced it, and **Edge** didn't have time to stand in line for the best part of a day to secure entry into a prize draw for a GameCube Wavebird controller. Nevertheless, we did manage to acquire a special translucent green Xbox controller, various bags and t-shirts, and – what surely has to be our most prized E3 free thing – a signed Top Trump-style fact card featuring *Rez*-creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi, complete with autograph obtained in return for an **Edge** Award.

02 Sticky Balls

UK: Founder of Zed Two, John Pickford, a regular user of **Edge**'s new improved Internet forum (http://forum.edge-online.com), has been using his forum signature as a viral marketing tool. The cause? *Sticky Balls*, a DarkBasic game of his own creation. Part pool, part *Puzzle Bobble*, the player is given a rectangular arena of differently coloured spheres, and asked to stick them in colour-coded clumps. When all the balls of one type have been stuck together they disappear, leaving opportunities for further bonding and more points. Rules and scoring are set up to encourage forethought above reckless play, and lengthy combos of smart shots produce suitably obscene scores. And, if all that's not enough to persuade you to give it a shot, think of the wealth of innuendo opportunity offered by the game's title alone. Play with John's balls at ftp.zedtwo.com/sticky.zip

Soundbytes

"Obviously, being killed in the virtual world isn't quite so serious. We don't have virtual officers writing letters to the dead soldiers' virtual parents, but we'd hope the games are authentic enough to reinforce good teaching."

Major Bruce Pennell, of the British Army's Logistics Corps, discussing the use of *Counter-Strike* to train troops.

"A fan of PC games, Ditzig recently bought a GameCube version of Capcom's *Resident Evil*, a horrific zombie munchfest, previously available for PC and Sony's PlayStation."

'USA Today' reveals Nintendo's new direction. What's a munchfest?

"The game business is unique. Software should come first and hardware second, but some people seem to see it the other way around."

Departing Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi offers new incumbent Iwata-san some advice.

"I'm really looking forward to that game [*Splinter Cell*]. It would be great if we could just turn *Splinter Cell* into *Metal Gear Solid X*."

Hideo Kojima waxes lyrical about the competition in 'Official Xbox Magazine'

Chrome Competition Winners

UK: Would-be eBay entrepreneurs inundated **Edge**'s inbox with videogame-related jokes in response to **Edge**'s chrome competition back in **E**110. No special mention goes to several unrepeatable efforts, but a special mention does go to Nick Powell (Knock, knock: Who's there?: John Romero [Fits of laughter]), and to Enrico Chiappalupi of Brescia whose entry was hamstrung by the cultural dislocation of videogame-related humour. But there can be only one winner and that's Dan Smith from Kent. Here is his very clever entry, in full:
"There are only 10 types of people in the world: those who understand binary and those who don't."

Big Time Virtuality

Japan: Get ready for the UK debut of Yuki Terai, a 17-year-old strawberry lover from Tokyo, the latest creation from Japanese animator Kenichi Kutsugi. In Japan, where virtuality is no obstacle to celebrity success, Yuki Terai has already hosted award shows, appeared in TV commercials and released hit music CDs. Now, she's set to star in a DVD. 'Yuki Terai – Secrets' will be released in the UK on August 26. Picture a videogame cut-scene starring a sexy, sassy, chick, featuring some inextricable pop video plotting and you're halfway to imagining what it's like. Throw in some mild titillation, slide shows and actual pop videos, and you're all the way there. Of course, **Edge** is more interested in the detailed animation tutorials which are also included.

Extreme Computing

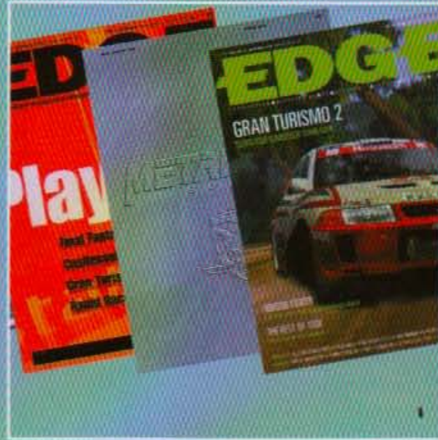
UK: Over 1,000 self-professed nerds and geeks descended upon the Camden Centre in London on June 9, to witness the Festival of Extreme Computing 2002. By all accounts, the event (described by its organisers as "a summer festival for those of us whose idea of a good time is sitting indoors hunched over a PC with the curtains drawn") was a roaring success, thanks to guests such as *Chuckie Egg* creator Nigel Alderton and Freeman Dyson, inventor of the Dyson Sphere. Organised by digital arts magazine 'MUTE' in conjunction with news Website 'NTK', it also featured live Weblogging, wireless networking workshops, robot building and stalls selling anything from retro games to Japanese junk food. Don't take **Edge**'s word for it though; a full report can be found on the Website of *Ant Attack* creator, Sandy White (http://sandywhite.co.uk/fun/xcom/).

Data Stream

- Japanese GameCube sales in the week beginning June 3: **18,700**
- Japanese GameCube sales in the previous week: **5,400**
- New price for Japanese GameCube from June 3: **¥19,800 (£110)**
- Microsoft's expected loss in financial year ending June 30, 2002, according to 'Red Herring': **$750m (£500m)**
- Microsoft's expected loss in financial year ending June 30, 2003, according to 'Red Herring': **$1.1bn (£733m)**
- Estimated loss made by Microsoft on every Xbox: **$150 (£100)**
- Microsoft's estimated cash reserves: **$42bn (£28bn)**
- Informa Media Group's forecast for global videogame sales in 2002: **$12bn (£8bn)**
- Cost of government project designed to attract teenagers into academia by combining learning with videogames: **£150m**
- Cost of feasibility study into said project: **£100,000**

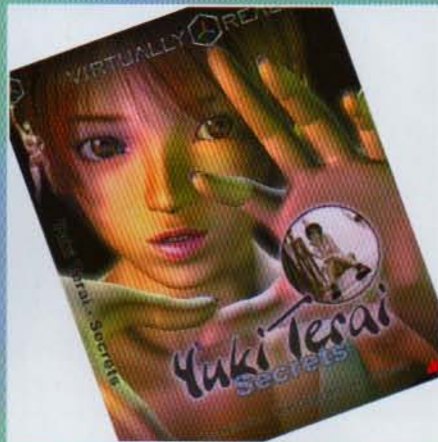


Geek chic comedian, Dan Smith, is the rather lucky recipient of ~~failed~~ early drafts of early **Edge** covers





Japan's latest virtual celebrity will be high-kicking her way to the UK thanks to DVD publisher, Escapi





The Yuki Terai DVD boasts in-depth animation tutorials. Along with plenty of mild titillation





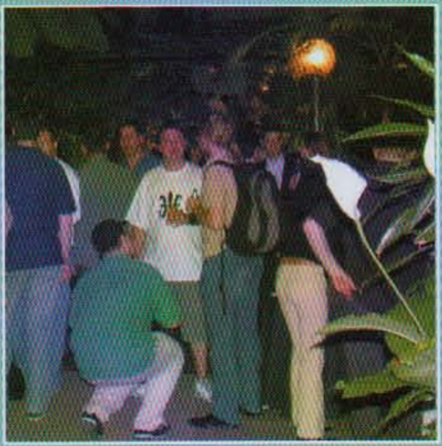
'NTK', friends of Stuart Campbell, and famously authoritative, get ready for some extreme computing

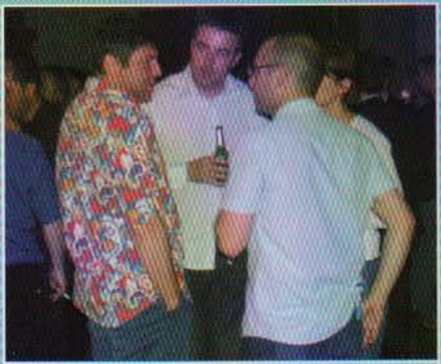


Lengthy queues necessitated some unhealthy exposure to sunlight, but it was worth it in the end



The tropical surroundings of the Barbican proved slightly more sophisticated than the Garrick's Head





Some of the videogame industry's most important people, standing around drinking beer. Unusual…







Yet again **Edge**'s penchant for videogames and big robots is met by some videogaming paraphernalia



So that's the secret of South Korea's World Cup success, putting any conspiracy theories to rest



Relive David Connolly's spectacular failure or David Beckham's glorious success in your living room

06 Edge Parties On

UK: For those lucky enough to be invited to **Edge**'s ultra-exclusive soirée, the rest of the videogame industry's social calendar will now probably pale in comparison. The event, which took place at the Barbican on June 19, boasted the biggest concentration of videogaming bigwigs and luminaries ever assembled in a single venue. But apart from the **Edge** editorial team, there were also several prestigious guests in attendance. I keeping with the tone of serious debate and informed discussion those who were invited were kept amused by the 'Game On' exhibition, free drinks and magic tricks courtesy of Jez San OBE.

07 Mecha Bomberman Fan Happy

Japan: The latest piece of Japanese videogaming memorabilia t become **Edge**'s favourite thing combines two of **Edge**'s oft-announced passions; multiplayer *Bomberman* and big robots Or, in this case, more precisely a big robot exoskeleton, enveloping a model of HudsonSoft's pyrotechnic protagonist. It's not quite as compelling as the legendary tenplayer sessions that the **Edge** team is used to enjoying on the Saturn version of the game, but it does beat *Bomberman Kart* and it would make an ideal gift for any obsessive fans. It's currently available in the UK from http://www.projectK.com

08 Excite Striker

Japan: Although World Cup fever will no doubt have died down by the time this issue reaches you, you'll soon be able to recreate 30-yard lobs in the safety of your own front room thanks to a nev device from Japanese manufacturer, Epoch. It consists of a controller, designed to be strapped onto a leg, and a reception module that is attached to a TV set, which translates real movements into onscreen action. Though **Edge**'s Japanese correspondent dismissed it with a derisory snort as "basically a toy," it's worth pointing out that he's probably still smarting from France's ignominious early exit from the real World Cup. In any case, there's also a tennis version available, though who'd want t recreate Tim Henman's early exit from Wimbledon?

Continue

Soft Rock
For taking **Edge**'s breath away
Edge's party at the 'Game On' exhibition
Well done us
The new teacher recruitment ads
For containing subliminal Sony advertising

Quit

'Redline's Downforce poster
A return to scantily clad girls advertising games
Edge's happy-bus back from our party
Advice for art editors: use the toilets at service stations
MoH Frontline and Spider-Man topping the charts
Don't people read the **Edge** reviews?

09 British Summertime

There's a degree of irony that while the genre looks to the future, most science fiction finds itself cemented in the time and place of creation. Even greats such as HG Wells and Asimov found their work reflecting the mores of their respective ages. It's a situation Paul Cornell has fully embraced in his second book 'British Summertime', setting it in his hometown of Bath around the time of the fuel crisis. The underlying scope of the story is much more tricky to pin down in a meaningful manner however. Unlike his deep-space contemporaries in the resurgence of British sci-fi, such as Richard Morgan and Alastair Reynolds, Cornell is more interested in the inner space of mysticism.

The book's constituent strands certainly make for bizarre bedfellows: a Dan Dare-style pilot of the future; apocalyptic prophecies pulled from the book of Revelations; a girl who works in a betting shop; a disillusioned Le Carre spy chief; a man who trepanes his skull; the thoughts of Judas Iscariot. Standard sci-fi plot devices are in evidence too – notably that old favourite the paradoxes of time travel.

Perhaps the closest comparison is Steve Aylett's 'Shamanspace' in that both books concern themselves with the implications of the existence of the divine. 'British Summertime' is a straighter read, of course, but the key thing is both authors realise that not every 't' and 'i' needs a crossed dot to provide meaning. 'British Summertime' is a book which is far more than the sum of its parts and is all the more stimulating and challenging for it.

10 High Score!

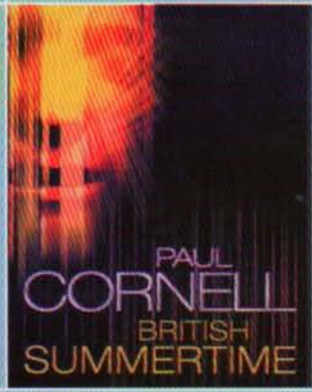
After years in the wilderness, videogames are finally becoming something of a niche interest in the world of publishing. In recent years there have been plenty of books released that explore the history of videogames. To stand out, any new kid on the block has to be a little bit special. 'High Score!' is. Chief among its distinctions is a depth of research often missing from rival publications. Rare archive photographs, including images of the VCS prototype, Stella, and one of only five early *Missile Command* cabinets (complete with mystifying 'extra panel') are just two such examples. Concept drawings of *Asteroids* and *Paperboy* (*Paperboy*, incidentally, originally had pianos running down the streets instead of cars) by Ed Logg and Dave Ralston, respectively, also make intriguing viewing.

All the major movements and events are covered with economy and though some may blanch at the slightly goofball tone (the word 'suckers' appears far too often) the authors clearly know the territory. If anything, readers will hunger for more detail and texture after hearing anecdotes such as Dave Theurer's objection to his game being called *Vortex* on the grounds that it sounds like a "female hygiene product." It was eventually called *Tempest*.

The book's only weakness is that it's too US-centric and in videogame terms is akin to Spielberg's WWII historiography. There's some coverage of Japanese big hitters Nintendo and Sega (though Sega, it is pointed out, was founded by an American) but little else. And if you are British, all you can look forward to is two pages on Peter Molyneux, half a page on *Lemmings* and a boxout on Rare. Regardless, 'High Score!' is an excellently illustrated book and though not quite up there with Steve L Kent's 'The First Quarter', it's well worth a look.

09

Author: **Paul Cornell**
Publisher: **Gollancz**
ISBN: **0 575 07368 3**



10

Authors: **Rusel DeMaria, Johnny L Wilson**
Publisher: **McGraw-Hill/Osborne**
ISBN: **0-07-222428-2**



11



Site: **Am I Game Or Lame?**
URL: **http://amigameorlame.segmented.net**

11 Website of the month

Playing the Web ratings game in a world long since bored of Hot-or-Not-like memes is difficult, but Am I Game Or Lame? deserves attention just for keeping things so simple. Calling up the site presents the viewer with two randomly selected games, and asks them to choose the best of them. It adds that choice to its ever-expanding database of binary decisions, and uses that knowledge to work out the best game of all time. While the results are questionable, and obviously open to fanboyism and subversion, the decision-making process does throw up some interesting questions. *Myst* or *Centipede*? *Defender* or *Perfect Dark*? *GoldenEye* or *Halo*? Your call.

12 Advertainment

Japan: Enterbrain celebrates the release of *RPG Tsukuru 5* (one of the most famous series domestically) with a competition: send in your own RPG concept to try to win plenty of money and the chance to turn your idea into reality. Go on, it can't be worse than this effort.



Enterbrain logo pops up. "When I woke up," says a timid voice…



"… my dog was big!"



Voiceover: "With your big doggy, you decide to go off to seek adventure."



Voiceover: "And then…"



Voiceover: "You too can easily build your own 3D RPG with *RPG Tsukuru 5*!"



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Management: it's time to get your hands dirty

Picture it. RedEye in his study, dim light, body hunched over a piece of Super Mario Club notepaper on his wooden writing desk, fist wrapped around a thick purple crayon. His tongue creeps out of the side of his mouth: this is intense concentration. "Dear **Edge**," he begins, and the crayon loops across the blank paper. "It was very nice of you bastards to…" Nice? No, that's not right. He crumples up the sheet, throws it over his shoulder, and hears it drop into the bin. The bin is full. A new sheet of paper. Try again.

"Dear **Edge**," RedEye writes. He pauses. Letters are so much harder when you're an obsessive compulsive thirdperson user. "Thank you ever so much for inviting RedEye to the **Edge** Industry Party last week." Hmm. It reads like RedEye is RedEye's secretary. "And how nice of you to put it on the same evening as the Beeson Gregory conference, providing RedEye with a chance to meet some videogame investors first hand." The crayon starts to shake.

"It was so great to hear one of them admit he hasn't played a game for five years." The shaking is more violent, the handwriting jagged. Part of the crayon breaks off on the paper. "Still, these are the people who fund us," – hnnngh – "who support new, creative ideas. Like…" The crayon snaps in RedEye's hand. He picks another, this time in red, but the flow's gone, concentration broken by anger, and all he can write is big waxy capital letters across the dead letter. "CROC TYCOON FIFA." Pause. No, not enough. "BASTAAAAAAAAARDS." Hmm. Not sure what the point was in writing so many As. Dramatic effect, RedEye guesses. Drop the crayon. Relax.

The party was fine. There weren't that many obnoxious people there, and there was plenty of free alcohol, and since it was held at 'Game On', the games exhibition currently taking place at the Barbican, there was plenty to do if the peripheral finance people got too much. And they had to be there – crayon all the nasty words you want, but they had to – because in difficult times, we live from their hands. Despite videogaming's rise, both in popularity and in social status, much of the industry is still in recession. Much of the industry is still begging.

The problem is that the only games that get support are traditional ideas revamped, because investors are gamblers and good gamblers don't bet the long shots. And, while past success is no guarantee of future performance, it's a good enough indicator for videogame sales, because of The Cycle. Here's how it works. Game X does well in '01. A sequel follows which, thanks to higher expectations, gets more support from the publishers. It gets bigger, bolder, better produced adverts. It gets mainstream advertising. It gets huge displays at the front of GAME. Videogame magazine journalists included buy into the hype, because if there's one thing that sells magazines, it's supporting a game everyone knows about.

And, naturally, following a raft of near-uniformly positive review scores, everyone buys the game – some realise how facile it is, some pretend it's great – and the hardcore move on to a more substantial thrill. The worry is the rest: non-gamers, suckered into giving it a go by hype and circumstance, invest, try, see it's throwaway, and never come back for more. "All games are the same," they think, quite understandably, but they've just been misled by other people's greed. A name for the cycle? While it's fresh in people's minds, let's call it Frontline Syndrome. RedEye's sure there's another *Medal of Honor* sequel in development. Meanwhile *Pillage* is still looking for a publisher.

"There are so many factors involved in the mainstream success of worthy videogames that all we can do is try and educate"

If everyone making the important decisions in the industry came up through the ranks, would it make a difference? 'TV Nation' asked a similar question in '93. A hyperactive Michael Moore, more wired than tired, long before he began to base his reportage around loud-mouthed rhetoric, issued a challenge to the CEOs of some major US companies. They were asked to perform some simple tasks using their company's products, and few managed it. Most refused to participate. Why should they? They've been trained to manage, not wash dishes or roll cigarettes. Out of touch? Sure. Does it matter? Maybe. Try some test cases.

Jean-François Cecillon, a man for whom 'out of touch' doesn't seem quite strong enough, came to Sega Europe from EMI. He has an executive producer credit on several Robbie Williams singles, and is personally thanked on the sleeve of Brian May's 'Another World' album, but his lack of understanding of the games market was breathtaking, and he left Sega Europe barely breathing. An **Edge** interview in **E**87 detailed his plans for the future of the Dreamcast. "You know, 2001 is our first test. If we pass that one successfully, we are sorted," he smiled. By the end of 2001, the Dreamcast was dead and Cecillon had resigned.

Contrast: Satoru Iwata joined Nintendo in 1982. For the first six months of his time programming for HAL Labs, his father wouldn't speak to him. He stayed there. Twenty years on, he's president of the world's oldest and most respected videogame company, succeeding Hiroshi Yamauchi at a time when Nintendo's position in the market has never been more threatened. Yamauchi, never a man to be pressured into decisions, must have absolute confidence that he's left Nintendo in safe hands.

We won't know for a while. But in the meantime, it's heart-warming to see Nintendo pushing *Pikmin* in expensive advertising slots, and while the excellent promos for *Frontline* have been drawing attention, RedEye will continue to profess the virtues of *Frequency* and *Rez*. Play it viral. There are so many factors involved in the mainstream success of worthy videogames – including decent investment, and competent management – that all we can do, as people who know what people should be playing, is try and educate. And no, crayon hissy fits aside, you can't blame the death of the Dreamcast entirely on Cecillon, and you won't be able to absolutely praise or damn Iwata-san for Nintendo's crucial next 12 months, but getting more people who know what they're doing into positions that count can't hurt.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Choice: sometimes you can have too much

Choice is the religion of our age. From parents of schoolchildren to supermarket shoppers, we are all constantly advised that more choice is a good thing. But we also know that hundreds of television channels, all showing garbage, does not constitute a meaningful choice at all. Videogames also offer increased choice: far from their austere, one-concept beginnings, they bristle with option menus and gameplay tweaks. But is it always the case that more is better?

More senior readers of **Edge** may remember a ZX Spectrum game called *Dark Star*, a brilliantly stylish 3D space shooter which at the time featured the most comprehensive 'front end' ever seen. Under the menu 'Change the game', it would let you decide how accurate and fast the enemy missiles were, decide how many enemy ships there would be, or even play without planets. *Dark Star* offered several quite discrete variations on its gameplay for the price of one.

This is one aspect that has increasingly come to define the videogame form: games are not just interactive but customisable. Of course, in theory it would be possible to buy a dramatic Turner seascape, hang it on your wall, and daub a bright pink cartoon chicken in the bottom right-hand corner, thus customising the painting to your own liking, but in an art-historical context that would normally be construed as vandalism, because the canvas is presented as existing and meaning in one definitive state.

Efforts to encourage the consumer to reimagine the artistic product have been made in other areas, however, from the short-lived fad in the '60s for loose-leaf novels, whose pages were not bound together and could be read in any order, to the release nowadays of electronic music tracks as tweakable aural toys on CD-ROM.

Dance music in particular, with its inherent culture of remixing, has almost thoroughly abandoned any notion of what is the 'definitive' version of one of its artworks, and in this sense it is still more radical than the videogame. For however many options it might offer the player, a videogame still needs to present a core experience that we feel represents the authentic nature of the gameplay.

The option to race without weapons in *Wipeout Fusion*, for example, is arguably an option too far, because it can be read as an implicit admission that the weapon balance in what we still feel is the 'core' game is disturbingly off-key; on the other hand, the non-combat racing is a curiously soulless experience. We thus have a choice between two slightly unsatisfactory modes of play, which is worse than having no choice, if the game is perfectly tuned in the first place.

Naturally there are many choices that are nice to have. The wondrous array of bot, weapon and gamestyle options in *Perfect Dark*'s multiplayer mode provides a near-inexhaustible Lego set of combat scenarios, but only within the context of a game whose oneplayer campaign is tightly controlled. The increase in options in modern videogames must also have something to do with a wish to appeal to an ever wider market, and an ever broader range of skillsets among gamers, but these arguments will always be double-edged.

One could argue that the option to use electronic helpers, such as traction control in *Gran Turismo 3*, is a cop-out, especially since it defaults to on, so that many players might never have to come to grips properly with the driving physics. On the other hand, the traction control is simulating a real device, and it leaves players free to challenge themselves later by refusing its aid.

"It's time to consider which choices are necessary and which are cop-outs; which are well-engineered and which muddy the issue"

The now-standard hub arrangement of areas in exploration games such as *Jak and Daxter*, meanwhile, offering the implicit option of selectable challenges, avoids the frustration of having to play one tricky level over and over again, but it can also easily lead to apathy and a loss of motivation, missing the focus and tension of linear adventures such as *Tomb Raider*.

The easiest way to appeal to a broad range of consumers, however, is also the most widely abused option system: that of selectable difficulty levels. So often a harder difficulty level merely makes the tasks the player has to complete more tedious: giving bosses longer health bars, or causing you to weep with boredom while you down yet more Metal Gears, is a horribly artificial way to extend the game. All too rarely do increased difficulty levels result in the player having to rethink her tactics and strategy in a creative way, as in *Halo* or *Advance Wars*.

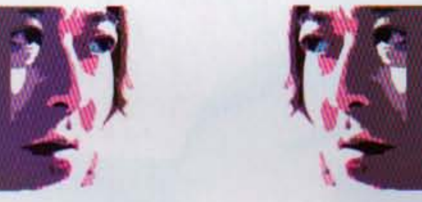
The PAL version of *Metal Gear Solid 2*, meanwhile, committed a cardinal sin with its pre-game questionnaire, when the consequences of answering its questions were not made at all clear. Meanwhile, the one option whose absence most players lamented – to play as Snake all the way through the game – is only to be addressed in the 'remix' of the game, tellingly named *Substance*.

We've come a long way since *Dark Star*, and maybe it's time to consider which choices are necessary and which are cop-outs; which are well-engineered alternatives and which simply muddy the issue. Arguably more videogames should limit front end choices to an absolute minimum, and offer key customisation decisions in-game, such as the clever way in which *Halo* dramatises its control options in the first level (which actually convinced me to change my long-held preference for inverted look).

There is a good aesthetic and psychological reason for this: when playing games we don't want to get the feeling that we are manipulating software. I know plenty of people who aren't preferences junkies and have never even figured out how to nuke Clippy in MS Word, so why should they want to wander through a similar forest of menus in their time off?

Furthermore, it can hardly be coincidence that some of the most refreshing games in recent times – *Ico*, *Luigi's Mansion*, *Pikmin* to name just three – offer the player virtually no options at all. For if the game is good enough in the first place, why would we want to change it?

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com



AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Infidelity: is Nagoshi-san really two-timing Nintendo?

Several days ago, I announced my entry into Xbox development with *Spikeout X-treme*. I believe there are many of you who don't know about this game so let me introduce it. It's a network fighting game in which up to four players can move freely in a realtime 3D environment.

I released *Spikeout* in '98 on Dreamcast and it received a good welcome from players. It had quite a number of core fans and even some dedicated Internet sites. Now I want to bring this pure action game onto Xbox Live. Yes, it will be quite an action game, and I hope the experience will be very exciting as a network game. I already have in mind some of the game's features but, of course, these must remain secret for the moment.

After I announced this title, many people asked me why I was doing it and even if I was feeling okay. I was left feeling quite disturbed. I mean, I don't remember saying that I would never develop on Xbox. Did I? Okay, I did the GameCube launch with *Super Monkey Ball* and later released *Virtua Striker 2002*. I also announced the development of *F-Zero* in cooperation with Nintendo and even revealed *Super Monkey Ball 2*, again all on GameCube. But that does not mean I work exclusively for Nintendo. The same applies for any eventual implication on PlayStation2. If there is a reason for me to work on this platform, I will without hesitation.

So, why did I start with GameCube? Let me explain. When Sega abandoned Dreamcast, the company chose a multiplatform solution. That meant we would develop for all the platforms on the market including Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo and PC. So we considered these four markets and I thought about what I would like to do. Then I considered what our resources were at that time. The thing I wanted to do was something I couldn't do on Dreamcast. I don't mean because of the hardware but due to the market. So I decided to develop on GameCube. Sega's consoles and games were destined for an older audience (ie not children) so I really wanted, even if it was a single experience, to design a game for Nintendo's young public. I admit I'm a big fan.

However, that does not explain my choice, not entirely. The resources issue was a big factor. I had no title to match the platform in terms of audience age, market, etc. Yes, I had to think about everything. However, I had two options. One was to develop something which would fit the platform. The other option was to change the platform and find one more adapted to the titles I had in mind. But I didn't have much time and I didn't have the perfect title in my hands. Then as I was thinking, and hesitating, I realised we had to overcome the challenge, if not… I thought we should develop a launch title. But again, I didn't have much time.

So when I was about to give up on the idea, I remembered I had *Monkey Ball*, which was initially an arcade title. It didn't have the impact I thought it would and had been forgotten. I really believed this game had tremendous potential, and I thought it was perfectly adapted for GameCube. The atmosphere, the gameplay, everything was perfect. Plus, it would not use many resources since the game had already been developed. It was obviously a much faster solution than beginning a new game from scratch. But, the game didn't have sufficient content. We started a process to exploit the game's potential through various minigames and we extended the game's size and increased the gaming experience. We made it in time for the launch. Well, hearing this, you should think this is a logic course of action right?

I really wanted, even if it was a single experience, to design a game for Nintendo's young public. I admit I'm a big fan

The following step was to look at the titles I had in hand and try some of them like *Virtua Striker*. Then there were talks about the Triforce project and then *F-Zero*. Well this was a unique chance to not only move into this new market but also to work with Nintendo together on a project. At the same time, I had good feedback about *Super Monkey Ball* so we decided to make a sequel and started the development of *Super Monkey Ball 2*. That's it.

Then I heard about *PSO* using Xbox Live. I felt it was fun and I thought it would be cool to develop on Xbox as well. So when I considered what I could do on Xbox, the first title which came to mind was *Daytona USA*. But I thought it would not be really challenging. I mean I had already developed and released *Daytona USA 2001* for Dreamcast compatible with the network feature. I preferred to deliver a pure action game with strong charisma. *Spikeout* was clearly an option. This action game is not based on the use of any weaponry but lets you use elements from the surroundings. This is a very dynamic action game. I believe my course of action is very logical, nothing surprising. Yes, when I decide that certain hardware is the perfect match for a title, well I should develop a game for that hardware.

However, I admit I had a very strong image since our launch title for GameCube. I mean, people thought we would only make games for Nintendo. I hope my explanations have been clear so that you can understand my reasons for each of my decisions so far. Working with Nintendo has been great experience. I have learned a lot. Really, this has been a big element. Of course, it's not over and we continue to work together. So I don't think this was a mistake, on the contrary. Of course, since we have been given the chance to develop on this new platform, it was unacceptable for us to not deliver a title at the top level. We worked hard to meet this objective. I think this behaviour is natural, according to the 'give and take' principle.

Working with Nintendo has been a great experience so far. I mean we did not have a very ordinary approach and we learned a lot. Yes, it is a great experience in the learning process of making games. Mmm… saying all these things, I still feel people would continue to say the same things to me. Well, so what? I mean, this is not because of Nintendo. If you take Microsoft or Sony, you have to consider what you are looking at in terms of business objectives and also the reasons why you are initiating this development. This idea was certainly at the centre of my decision to start working with Nintendo. And this same idea applies for Microsoft. So one day, I might feel the need the go for another challenge with Sony. If I ever get the strong feeling that a game would not be possible anywhere other than with Sony, then I would announce my entry. I hope this has been clear and not too confusing for all of you. See you.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4



TOKYO GAME LIFE

Lupin Kojima, sub editor-in-chief, 'Game Wave DVD'

Emptiness: Kojima-san remembers his first time

So who owns videogames? I know the answer now, but the idea that I forgot it even for some small time hurt me inside

Japan is in the grip of football fever. To tell you the truth, I am too, watching the matches on a monitor I have on my desk. And it is in these conditions that I'm bringing you my latest Tokyo Game Life. The problem is that as far as my job at 'Game Wave DVD' is concerned… well, at the moment it's just not very interesting, and because of that, this month, I've come up short about what to write. "Why?" I can hear you ask. After all, May was full of news and events. There was E3, the start of the *Final Fantasy XI* online gaming, the date with the girl I love – it's been a great time for me! Even if **Edge** were to turn into a weekly publication, I should be able to keep up.

Well, well, well, the subject I chose this time is… let me think about this for a while… the way to get me back on track, on Earth. Hmm. Ah, I have an idea. How about this? Who owns videogames? I mean for whom are videogames made? Have you ever thought about that? It does a person good to ask basic questions about their hobbies. Every day, as I'm really busy, I feel that I forget the reasons why I'm doing things. When you get older or more experienced, you arrive at a point where you forget about the very first time, the beginning. So I would like to go back to that. Although actually, the first time is always tricky to talk about, I mean I'm embarrassed. Maybe after we talk about it, I can get some rest?

So, again, who owns videogames? This is like a question asked by a politician it's so vague, but I have been troubled by this matter. My professional life is full of videogames, just as my private life is, but I feel as though I can't find satisfaction anymore. I think I know the reason for this. More and more I see videogames as 'work': articles, developing relationships with game makers, advertising people, and so on. You can see why it's natural that I see videogames as work. When you do anything too much it becomes normal. That's why I want to remember the first time.

The thing is, I joined this company to work but also to have fun. Videogames are precious for creators who made them and for us, in the press, they are very important too. But the most important people in the videogame world are the users, the players. Two years ago, we designed and launched 'Game Wave DVD' to fulfil players' needs. Somewhere along the way, we have forgotten that. This has been a revelation to me, recently. One person made me see it. Thanks to **Isamu Yamagishi** from Beat Live, a game centre at Machida. Thank you very much.

Let me take you to May 5, Tokyo at Ariake: a *Virtua Fighter 4* tournament. By the time the tournament ended, 1,200 people had gathered to watch and participate. It was a great event. When the time came to pack up, I had a chance to speak with Yamagishi-san of Beat Live, but only for five minutes. His words had such an impact on me that I have not been able to forget them.

Videogames are for players.

Yamagishi-san initiated this tournament back to 1994, just after *Virtua Fighter 2* was first released. He organised the very first tournament at Machida in his arcade, Athena. At that time, fighting games were an individual pleasure, something to enjoy alone. However, Yamagishi-san wanted to change that and set a rule so that five people could form a team and take part in his tournament. Users formed teams rapidly. Some were made with friends from the same arcade centre while others were made of people with no link to one another, but for the common desire to win the tournament.

As this event happened each year, people started to recognise the teams who appeared regularly, some of which included the very same fighters from the first tournament. The tournament atmosphere was like the Olympic games – or the World Cup – or any other sports competition where people support some teams and boo others with passion, love and hate. Players discovered the fun of playing within a team. People were communicating each other inside a team, forming strategy and planning according to the fight in progress. "Even if I lose this time, I know you are going to win the next round," they might smile, or, "I will win this round, so let me go and fight." The event was full of such discussions, such interaction, such bravado.

While the fighting game was designed as an individual pleasure, this tournament did a tremendous work in changing that. Throwing away the idea of playing videogames alone, a new perception of singleplayer games as multiplayer events was born. I considered Yamagishi-san was the creator of this event.

But a few days after, I had another chance to speak with him, and I was finally able to truly understand what he meant by saying that "videogames are the property of players." To be honest, I was ashamed to have forgotten my first time – to have forgotten that very first feeling. There was no single person who made this event. "I did not make this event," said Yamagishi-san. "The players did. We just gave them the place to do it. The only reason this tournament became a major event is because people gathered in large numbers to share their common enjoyment. Oh, I should add my love for *Virtua Fighter* as well. My love, stronger than my skill. I am not a skilled player, but I felt the desire to go to such event so I made it."

Yamagishi's event is not an official one supported by any game makers. It is built on his game centre's revenue and the players' registration fee. He even sells the video of the event but there is no intention to profit from this tournament. Why? Because the revenue of one tournament should always be used as a base for the next one. Videogames are players' property. We should never forget that. We make the magazine because there are people who want to read it. We make the video because there are people who want to see it. And, with the revenue from the magazine, we should make a greater videogame magazine. But, first, we need a little more revenue…

So who owns videogames? I know the answer now, but the idea that I forgot it even for some small time hurt me inside. You can't forget the players. Now I've found a new force to go forward, which is good, because despite the games, despite the girl, I have been feeling empty. Now I've remembered the first time, I can say goodbye to the serious May of my Tokyo Game Life.

Lupin Kojima is the sub editor-in-chief of 'Game Wave DVD', part of the Famitsu publishing portfolio

Edge's most wanted

Super Mario Sunshine
(GameCube) Nintendo
The wait is nearly over. Expectations are ludicrously high although signs from the E3 code point to evolution rather than revolution. But you never know...



Blinx: The Time Sweeper
(Xbox) Microsoft
We still don't like the lead character (little more than a second rate Bagpuss after all) but after checking out a new demo, the game itself continues to grow on us.



Deus Ex II: Invisible War
(PC, Xbox) Eidos
Playing through the original's PS2 port recently has heightened our anticipation of this go-anywhere, do-anything first-person shooter. Yay for Warren Spector.



Metroid Fusion
(Game Boy Advance) Nintendo
Who wouldn't want to experience a better looking (and gameplay improved) version of this fabulous 2D platformer on the GBA's cute widescreen display?



Size really does matter

But make it short and thrilling

Thank God for short games. Time is just too precious, and far too many videogames are flabby, repetitive and onerous. And **Edge** is not even talking about the downright awful games that proliferate the market. It's the average games that often really disappoint. The sort of games that could have been something very special if more time had been spent on honing the core gameplay elements rather than elongating the experience to 'satisfy' gamers.

It was refreshing to hear Tecmo's Itagaki Tomonobu (see p50) admit that if he had his way he would make *Ninja Gaiden* a two-hour experience. This is an extreme example, but just think about it. The same amount of development time, but every morsel of energy going into making it the most refined and intense game experience possible. Okay, it still might not have become the greatest videogame ever created, but chances are, it would be an improvement over the majority of interminably long action/adventure games that hit the shelves.

Indeed, RPGs aside, the Japanese are much better at building short and finely crafted adventures: *Devil May Cry*, *Onimusha Warlords*, *Biohazard*, *Metal Gear Solid 2*. They can all be completed around the eight-hour mark. Contrast these with clumsy western releases such as *Shadow Man: 2econd Coming*, *Severance: Blade of Darkness*, *Hitman* and *American McGhee's Alice*. Even the *Tomb Raider* titles (certainly later examples) lacked the subtlety of control necessary to make them a truly satisfying experience.

Asking how long the perfect game should be is the wrong question. If a game is superbly entertaining it's natural conclusion should offer no barrier to extended play. The *Tony Hawk's* games provide a good illustration. The game is built on sublime handling and a modular structure. Truth is, you can get to the final area of any *Tony Hawk's* game within a few hours, but the game is so painfully addictive that you'll probably go through and unlock every feature, tripling its lifespan. Similarly, the Japanese extend the lifespan of narrative games by building in unlockable characters and secrets.

Edge is not advocating an eight-hour lifespan for every type of game, but perhaps a few developers might want to think about concentrating on a few of the fundamentals before employing a team of storyboarders and script writers. As has been said before, a two-hour thrill is much better than a 20-hour bout of tedium.













Super Mario Sunshine

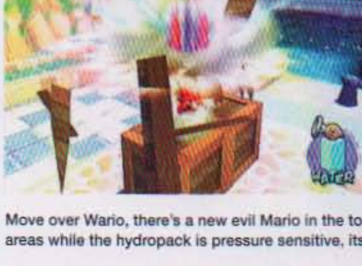
Just two months between first (and only) preview code and release day still leaves Nintendo's PR plenty of time to divulge a steady trickle of new details













Move over Wario, there's a new evil Mario in the town square (above right). Shine stars open new island areas while the hydropack is pressure sensitive, its range dependent on how much you press the R button

Since its first playable appearance at E3, NCL has released new holiday snaps of Mario's tropical adventure that coincide neatly with **Edge**'s desire to share more details (most of which failed to make last month's report due to strict space constraints) concerning the return, after a six-year sabbatical, of Nintendo's most popular series.

But to the Kodak moments first. There's nothing remarkably different from the batches seen previously, to be fair, although the appearance of Mario's impersonator certainly warrants a mention. Seemingly constituted entirely of water (allowing the developer to show off more impressive reflection effects) but otherwise a perfect doppelganger of Japan's most famous plumber, this impostor, if you remember from last month, is going around the island defacing public surfaces with graffiti while fooling the islanders over his true identity.

As Mario, you have to go around the island clearing things up. The Shine stars yc collect open up previously unattainable area thus extending the play area. The villages dotted around the map set the tone of the locale, which is why the harbour town from the playable demo has a demonstrably mor industrial feel than the seaside hamlet. (Hav said that, **Edge** did play a rather abstract le at E3 involving giant children's play blocks moving mid-spacial void, so expect surprise

The cleaning and jetpack-like properties Mario's hydroweapon are, by now, well documented, as is the ability to obtain additional nozzles. But less so is the fact th finding the right item boosts the pump mechanism and acts as a turbo, propelling Mario around the scenery at remarkable velocity (with suitably impressive visual effec to match, naturally). Furthermore, another such item-influence is the massively increa performance range of the jetpack mode wh develops the ability to send you high in the





Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **July 19 (Japan), October (UK)**

Previously in **E**112





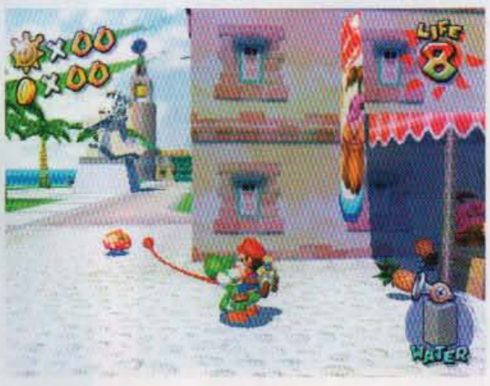












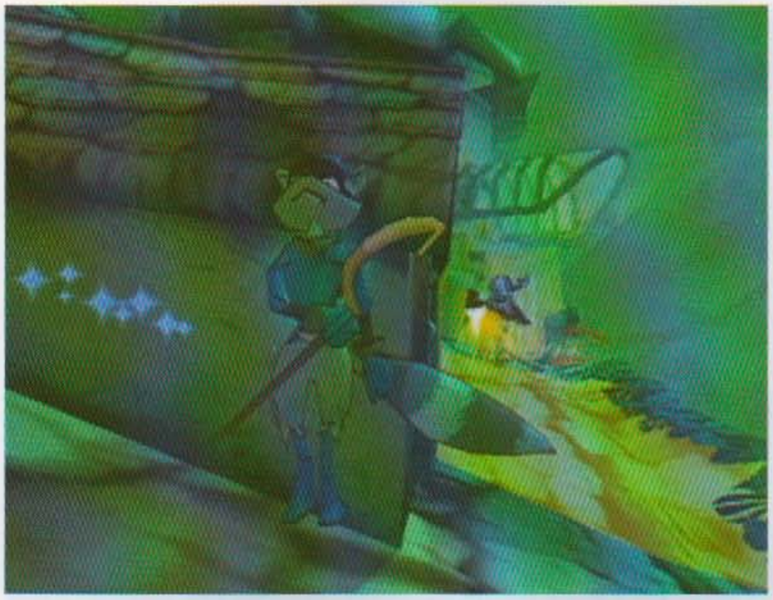
Sunshine is a crucial release. Nintendo's major consoles have traditionally stood firm on pillars made up of examples of outstanding videogaming material such as the *Mario* and *Zelda* series. For many, a significant amount of the GameCube's validity/credibility as a worthy alternative to the competition rests on the realisation that this at the very least matches its predecessors in terms of innovation, revelation and distilled delectation. Review next issue.

Purchasing giant fruit from a marketeer replenishes energy and unlike previous *Mario* titles, the level structure appears fully open, *Zelda* style. Just one more month, and all is revealed

Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus

Format: PlayStati
Publisher: SC
Developer: Sucker Pu
Origin:
Release: September (US), TBC (

Developer Sucker Punch borrows from other genres to add character to the growing proliferation of platform titles







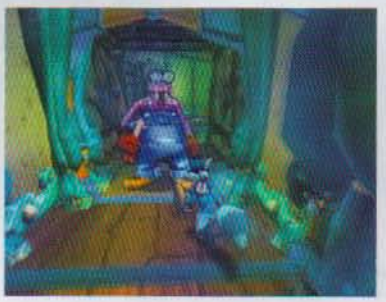




The blend of conventional platforming elements with a hint of stealth and adventure is initially appealing, though the implementation is slightly heavy handed

Shading it

Although the cel-shading technique used to lend character to Sly Cooper and chums isn't as pronounced as that in titles such as *Jet Set Radio*, there were still grumbles at E3 that Sucker Punch has jumped on an undesirable graphical bandwagon. In **Edge**'s opinion though, it's hardly cel-shading for the sake of it, it's barely more pronounced than the conventional animation of something like *Jak and Daxter*, and it looks rather nice. So there's no complaints from us.





Sony's latest *Jak and Daxter*-alike was rather overshadowed by the illustrious platforming company it kept at this year's E3. Titles such as *Blinx* on Xbox, *Super Mario Sunshine* on GameCube and *Ratchet & Clank* (another title that clearl owes a debt of inspiration and technology to Naughty Dog's latest opus) on PS2 were a more obvious sign of a minor renaissance in the fortunes of the humble platform game. Even so, Sucker Punch's rich characterisatic and canny borrowings from other genres stil caught the eye. It remains a bit rough around the edges but there are signs of promise.

The plot, such as it is, sees our titular he on a quest to avenge the theft of the Thieviu Raccoonus, a family heirloom containing the insights and techniques of thievery that earned generations of his family a reputation as the world's greatest thieves. With the cursory plot in place, it's up to Sly's chums, Bentley the turtle and Murray the hippo to provide assistance and tutorial-style advice. Indeed the conceit of discovering pages of t Thievius Raccoonus, which are scattered about, lends a progressive unlock structure and a potentially satisfying learning curve.

All conventional platforming elements ar present: coin collection leads to more lives; other pick-ups such as horseshoes lend a level of invulnerability; keys access new area off the main hub; and pages from the Raccoonus contain new moves and techniques, such as special attacks and the now ubiquitous 'bullet time'. Nevertheless, i' not a strictly standard example of the genre. There are shades of point and click, for example, through the narrative and characte development, and set-piece puzzle solution - such as tiptoeing through traps using a barrel as protection. There are also element of the stealth 'em up, with much of the avoidance-themed platform action borrowir heavily from *Metal Gear Solid* – a purple/blu haze around objects indicates that Sly is ab to employ a range of Solid Snake-style sneaking techniques for example.

Edge does have some reservations though. A sluggish camera undermines the heavy-handed implementation of contro and, initially at least, the difficulty level and set-piece puzzle structure can seem contrived. Which rather weakens the novel elements that the developer has introduced into the mix. It's not clear whether this will b tidied up in time for release, but it will have if *Sly Cooper* is to match the other high-profile platformers on display at E3.

Fat Man and Slim

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **ATD**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **TBC**

With every other game at E3 trying to be Halo, Burnout or GTAIII, it was refreshing to arrive back on the right side of the Atlantic to be confronted by a title attempting to do things differently

"But isn't it *Super Monkey Ball*?" you ask, having glanced at the shots on this page. Well, no. It isn't. *Fat Man and Slim* started life as a PS2 tech demo some months ago (a GC version is expected to follow). Admittedly it hasn't progressed substantially beyond this at this stage but already gameplay indications are promising and this is why **Edge** is featuring it this early.

Fat Man spends his time curled up in a ball. In this state he possesses three physical attributes: his initial appearance allows him to bounce around but a swift button press sees him turns into a ball of fur while a subsequent tap changes him into a metal sphere. The attraction at this stage is how these, by altering the way Fat Man reacts to his environment, affect the game dynamic (for instance, in water bouncy mode floats, fluffy mode remains partially submerged while metal sinks to the bottom). And you can combine them so that you may wish to bounce into the air, turn to metal to come down faster, revert to bouncy mode to gain more air and then change to a ball of fluff in order to retard your descent and make it across a perilous, gargantuan gap. The game's entire premise revolves around offering you the ability to overcome a variety of puzzling situations by using your character's properties and the resulting sense of freedom when negotiating the stages is as attractive as it is uncommon.

The current structure has you saving your girlfriend, Slim, who's been kidnapped by someone or other and her spirit is trapped within a totem, three of which are found on each of the levels. To free her you must destroy the totem (you can drag bombs in metal mode only – it's up to you to work out how to get past obstacles such as fences), then charge the spirit up by collecting a number of tokens that appear around the level within a limited amount of time, and finally guide her towards the level goal. Like bombs, the spirit only links to Fat Man's metal mode – change mode or stray too far and the link breaks sending the spirit slowly back towards the totem (this can occasionally work to your advantage as you may use it to bypass a particularly tricky obstacle – let her go, race around to the other side and catch her again).

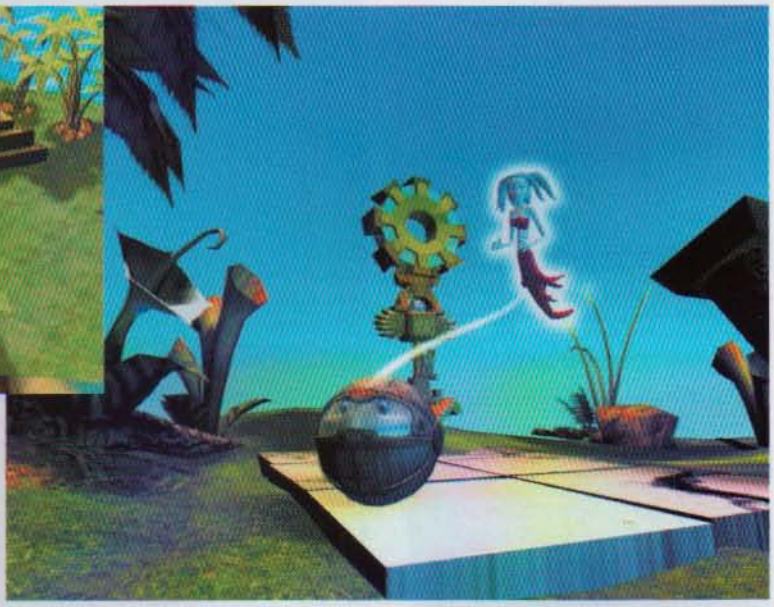
There's plenty of potential, then, in *Fat Man and Slim*. Let's just hope that whoever picks up the publishing deal on this one doesn't feel the need to mess around with the concept too much…











ATD is aware of the need to implement many fun elements and the structure is by no means finalised. A skeleton team is responsible for the work to date

There's more…

Like most aspects of the game's environments, elements such as mist, water and grass have gameplay implications (grass, for example, can be flattened to ensure that thrown bombs explode on contact with the ground; reflections off the water surface can reveal puzzle solutions by displaying the underneath of structures). Other features include catapults that can be used to propel Fat Man against walls (in order to break them), ramps and pinball-style bumpers.





Medieval Total War

Format: P
Publisher: Activisi
Developer: The Creative Assemb
Origin: U
Release: Augu
Previously in E1

Combining historical accuracy with tactical depth and strategic complexity, the successor to Shogun looks set for a long reign



Given the willingness of developers to unthinkingly ape any successful additions to an oft-imitated RTS formula, **Edge** is slightly disappointed that nobody seemed to notice our bold prediction back in **E**85. *Shogun: Total War*, we argued, represented "a possible prototype for the future of the genre… a serious strategic undertaking that points the way ahead."

Still, with seemingly nobody heeding our call, the lack of any similar title in the intervening years makes anticipation of the forthcoming sequel, *Medieval Total War*, all the more sweet. Especially since Creative Assembly appears to have judiciously expanded upon the original without sacrificing any of the elements that appealed so much.

As the title implies, the action has moved westward and forward in time to Europe between 1083 and 1453, which, as historical fact fans will no doubt be aware, spans conflicts such as the Albigensian Crusade, through the battle of Agincourt to the actual Crusades themselves and the fall of Constantinople. The mix of turn-based strategy and realtime warfare returns intact, but with the range of actions, options and resources suitably expanded. Thus, there are now 12 different nations, drawn from three religions (Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam), with an AI-controlled pope dispensing religious favours in the background. Each religion has its own unique tech tree, with 100 different unit types contributing to a much greater sense of tactical complexity on the battlefield, while generals and other special characters lend an air of historical authenticity, as well as strategic depth.

An improved engine allows a greater amount of visual detail, which is essential given that the already significant number of onscreen units has also increased. And in case it ever threatens to get too chaotic, the developer has also thrown in improved troop AI and more effective formations – though this cuts both ways, since enemy formations now undertake devastating feints and fake retreats to lure your men-at-arms into untenable positions.

Nevertheless, a more accessible interface, and a more sophisticated troop grouping system should enable players to see off this increased threat, so that they can return to the turn-based sections ready to dispense patronage in the form of offices and titles, and conduct diplomacy to build up their power base.

Although there's always a danger of over-egging the pudding when it comes to the simplicity of the RTS dynamic, seeing *Medieval Total War* in fluid, vibrant motion dispels any potential doubts, as manoeuvrable Mamelukes harry heavily armoured knights, and siege engines smash down enemy fortifications. No wonder it's already got celebrity fans.



A new engine facilitates a greater number of more detailed units, but it's the greater scope and range of tactical complexities that is really impressive about Creative Assembly's follow up to *Shogun: Total War*

Recommended reading

Edge is a wholehearted supporter of Creative Assembly's dedication to increasing the popular reach of medieval history. So we'd just like to prepare you for the game's release with our own light reading list:

- 'The Making of the Middle Ages', RW Southern
- 'The Waning of the Middle Ages', Johan H Huizinga
- 'The Making of Europe', Robert Bartlett
- 'The Medieval Siege', Jim Bradbury
- 'Chivalry', Maurice Keen
- 'A History of Warfare', John Keegan
- 'The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought', MS Kempshall
- 'Medieval Women', Henrietta Leyser
- 'The Crusades : Islamic Perspectives', Carole Hillenbrand





Like one **Edge** member, CA clearly has an unhealthy obsession with the minutiae of medieval history, adding atmospheric depth to strategic shenanigans





Big Mutha Truckers

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Empire**
Developer: **Eutechnyx**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **October**

The hitherto untapped lorry-driving inbred hick trading simulator genre finally gets an airing

There aren't many games that afford the opportunity to adopt the role of a redneck truck-driving hick charged with building a ruthlessly capitalistic power base. So for that reason alone, *Big Mutha Truckers* will be breaking new ground. The slightly quirky combination of destructive driving and canny commercial dealings that forms the main part of the game is an intriguing one, while the finished product is also set to encompass a seamless game universe, open-ended gameplay and a complementary mission-based structure. Gameplay elements are inspired by sources as diverse as *Dope Wars*, *Grand Theft Auto III*, *Crazy Taxi* and *18 Wheeler*.

Judging from the very early demos that **Edge** has been privy to, there's still work to be done to match these sources in terms of quality. A solid physics engine is already in place to cope with the handling of articulated lorries, along with a rudimentary implementation of the game's trading element and a few examples of side-missions – certainly enough to feel optimistic that if these elements are brought together successfully, the game could offer a rich experience. The main game structure is based on a 60-day mission in which, playing as one of four characters, your task is to prove your worthiness as a successor to your grizzly crime-boss Ma, by making more money than your three siblings.

The main means of achieving this goal is by trading in goods and commodities between five cities, but there's also the chance to conduct special deliveries and other opportunistic money-grabbing prospects. Indeed these special missions will also be playable on their own as part of a standalone arcade mode should the main part of the game prove too unstructured.

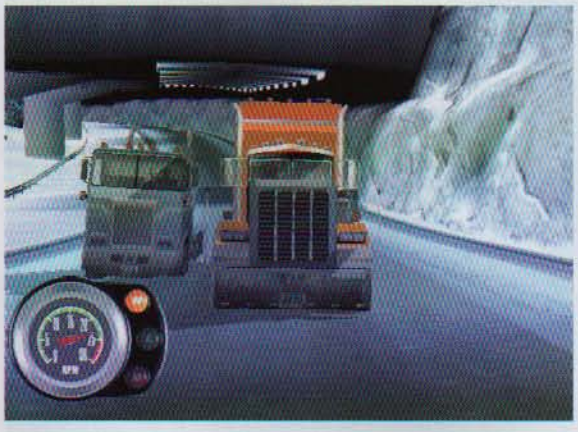
The trading component of the game plays like a more intelligent version of *Dope Wars* and though it's based on a sophisticated economic model that was initially playtested in isolation, truck jackers, police cars and gangs of Hell's Angels all threaten to throw a spanner in the works of the most deftly constructed hicksville money-spinning plot.

Additional obstacles include one-off events such as tornadoes, earthquakes, and UFO landings. Vehicle upgrades and the services of loan sharks will be available to assist players though, and the developer is also promising a multitude of hidden extras and easter eggs to heighten the impact of a consistent game universe. Certainly there's sufficient promise to suggest that the combination of arcade-style immediacy with the open-ended trading model will prove engrossing and absorbing.

Mini-game gang

In addition to the one-armed bandits that are playable at various truck stops throughout Hick State County, *Big Mutha Truckers* also features several mini-games to punctuate the flow of the rest of the game and complement special missions. Attacks by truck jackers and Hell's Angels, for example, give players a limited time in which to swerve and weave in a bid to hurl assailants from their rig. Should the timer count down, players will literally lose their load.









The *Dope Wars*-style trading game at the heart of *Big Mutha Truckers* should be absorbing enough on its own, but throw in some hillbilly truck-driving violence, a host of subquests and mini-games, and an open-ended game universe (with no loading screens, boasts the game's developer), and the game could be a very enticing prospect



Contra Advance

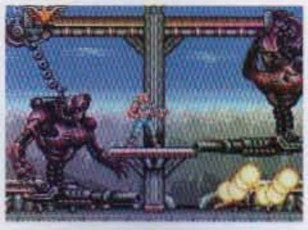
Format: Game Boy Advan
Publisher: Kona
Developer: In-hou
Origin: Jap
Release: Novemb

A struggle on Normal mode and almost impossible on Difficult, Contra III remains one of the SNES' most enduring titles. Prepare for a triumphant return on GBA





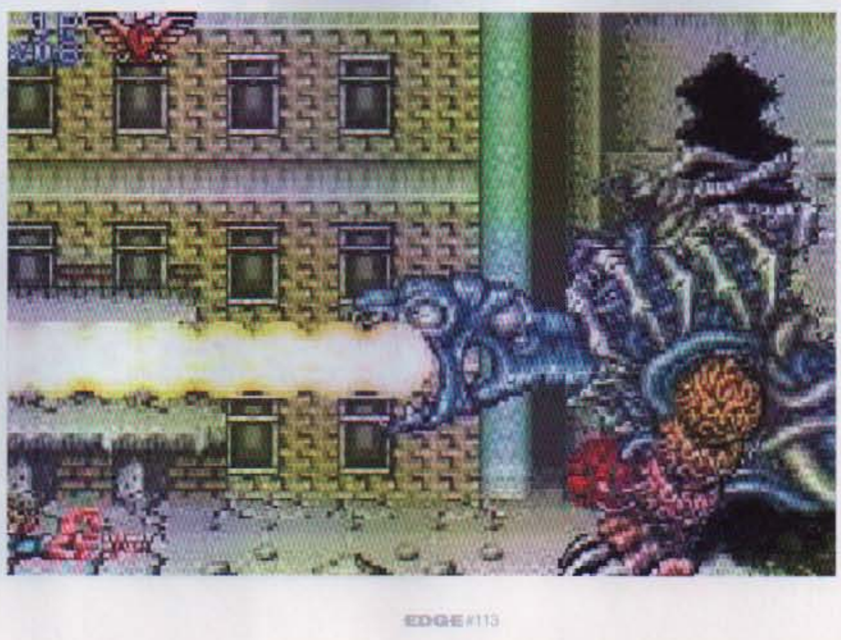










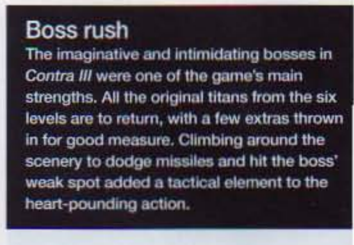


Contra III on SNES used Mode 7 to devastating effect and provided some of the most dramatic set-pieces ever seen in a 2D videogame. Expect even greater things from the slightly more powerful GBA architecture

One of the all-time SNES greats, *Contra III*, is set to return on GBA. Although the comeback hardly quashes criticisms that the format is home to cheap conversions, fans of the original will not be complaining. The game's mixture of frantic platforming, pulverizing weapon effect and formidable boss encounters set it apart from other contenders in the genre (it even managed a respectable 72nd place in **Edge**'s top 100 in **E**80). Details are still a little scant but Konami promises classic levels plus new areas designed to take advantage of the host system.

Apart from adding a fresh lustre to the visuals, Konami is also providing a twoplayer link-up mode, which should see both players battling the hordes of biotech aliens through both the classic and new areas. Although the current batch of screenshots hint at things to come, there's no sign of the innovative top-down perspective levels that thrilled gamers back in 1992. **Edge** certainly hopes that they make a comeback.

Extra features include new weapons, power upgrades and secrets to unlock. Indeed, the GBA's L and R buttons perfectly mirror those on SNES joypads so the simultaneous weapon firing abilities of the original game seem assured. Prepare yourself for some serious thumb ache.



Boss rush

The imaginative and intimidating bosses in *Contra III* were one of the game's main strengths. All the original titans from the six levels are to return, with a few extras thrown in for good measure. Climbing around the scenery to dodge missiles and hit the boss' weak spot added a tactical element to the heart-pounding action.

Metroid Fusion

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **November**

3D or not 3D? Those still unimpressed by Retro's efforts can take heart from the 2D sequel, constructed by the original Super Metroid team





One of the most finely balanced titles on the SNES (or indeed any platform), *Super Metroid* squares up to today's releases with surprising ease. Expect the GBA version to continue the tradition while introducing intriguing elements

Retro Studios may yet get away with injecting a third dimension into Samus' world but the really brave move would have been to have kept the 2D perspective of the previous games. On the surface, *Metroid Fusion* would seem to offer all the elements that made the last outing on SNES such an absorbing experience: a variety of aliens with unique attack patterns, imaginative weapon and ability upgrades and a deeply atmospheric gameworld. However, there's still some confusion over Samus' role in the game.

A one-level demo at E3 displayed a blue-and-yellow bounty hunter battling against the X species – a virus that infects harmless organisms around the levels and transforms them into various aliens. Destroy an alien and the X can be caught for an energy boost. The title suggests that the new Samus has somehow been fused with a Metroid to provide her with new abilities, though another Samus-like character appearing at the end of the demo casts some doubt on this. Confused?

Whatever plot threads are in store, the fact that *Super Metroid* director, Yoshio Sakamoto, is back at the helm is cause for celebration. Shigeru Miyamoto has even gone on record saying that he'd like to see some GameCube/GBA link-up. **Edge** remains very excited.





Conflict: Desert Storm

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC, PC**
Publisher: **SCi**
Developer: **Pivotal**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **September**

Apparently it's "like Bravo Two Zero without the torture." Presumably due to licensing restrictions...







Singleplayer calls to mind *Operation Flashpoint* and *Hired Guns*, but it's in splitscreen cooperative that *Conflict: Desert Storm* is expected to excel, providing the enemy AI is smart enough

In these days of franchise exploitation publishers are racing to tether their games to something recognisable – a brand, a celebrity or even a war. After all, you might have worn holes in your 'We spanked Saddam' t-shirt, but you haven't played the game of the Gulf War. At least not yet. *Conflict: Desert Storm* is shaping up as far more than a named cash-in. It represents a fusion of genres, mixing the tactics and squad-based principles of PC epics such as *Counter Strike* with the balls-out face-offs of the thirdperson console brigade.

In a string of sandy locales you assume control of up to four soldiers, retracing the steps of the special forces' well-publicised war against Iraq during the Gulf Conflict. The game's early problems, such as sniper-bustingly short draw distances and sedentary loading times, are being tackled with extra development time. No, really.



Beneath staid mission briefs (rescue, protect, destroy) and familiar incentives (improved weapon skills and promotions a la *Cannon Fodder*) lies a potentially immersive experience. You'll fight to protect your charges and even tip-toe through cross-fires to rescue your convulsing comrades. Whether *Conflict: Desert Storm* achieves a masterstroke of gameplay balancing to satisfy both tactical junkies and those with itchy trigger fingers remains to be seen.

Smash Cars

Format: PlayStatio
Publisher: Metro3
Developer: Creat Stud
Origin: Russ
Release: Q1 2003 (US), TBC (U

Previously in E1

Creat Studio promises a smashing radio-controlled drive around authentic environments. **Edge** is impressed





The most impressive aspect of *Smash Cars* is undoubtedly the handling, which conveys the lightweight responsiveness of the real thing

Radio-controlled cars are very dear to **Edge**'s heart, so it's a major disappointment that no videogame has yet come close to recreating the Nicad-charged/petrol-powered mini thrills of the real thing. Which is why the Russian developed *Smash Cars* is shaping up to be such an attractive prospect.

Of course, *Smash Cars* packs in the standard range of shortcuts, racing modes and championships, with upgrades available after winning prize money and new tracks waiting to be unlocked. Then there are the courses, which take in 'real-life' locations, such as beaches complete with giant objects, animals and people to negotiate, and attractively authentic waves lapping against the shoreline.

However, the really enticing aspect of the game is its wonderful recreation of the handling and physics of actual radio-controlled cars, complete with their sparky suspension, bouncy handling and rapid responsiveness. Indeed, although there have been several R/C-based titles in the past, this is always the area in which they've disappointed the most. Of course, if *Smash Cars* is to be a true success, the developer will have to come up with rival AI that matches the visuals and the handling that are already in place. Otherwise, **Edge** will just have to dust off the real thing.





The race tracks are depicted to scale and feature a number of gargantuan obstacles, including irritable humans who, when sufficientl annoyed, are prone to picking your radio-controlled car up and hurling it into the distanc

Total Immersion Racing

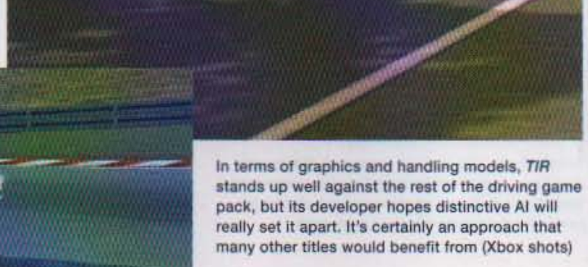
Format: PS2, Xbox, P
Publisher: Empire Interacti
Developer: Razorwor
Origin: U
Release: C

Previously in E1

AI-controlled road rage promises to heighten the sense of immersion in Razorworks' authentically arcadey racing game

With a glut of driving games in the pipeline, and each one looking remarkably similar and handling astoundingly alike, any developer worth its salt will have a unique selling point up its sleeve in a bid to inch ahead of the pack. The distinguishing feature of *Total Immersion Racing* is an AI system that promises a computer-controlled field of rivals, each of which possesses a distinct personality and – more significantly – a long memory. It's a neat idea, which is rather at odds with the almost non-AI philosophy demonstrated by *Gran Turismo*, but it should be capable of creating season-long rivalries to increase the competitive ante; any especially aggressive jostling for position in early races could easily be regretted as the season wears on.

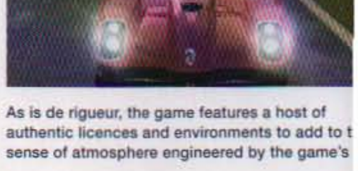
Apart from the AI, *Total Immersion Racing* stands up respectably next to its competitors, featuring graphics and handling models that are comparable to the majority. In terms of structure, the game sees you progress along a career path from lowly GT driver to a world champion with the right to indulge in prototype race cars. And, rather unsurprisingly, it features a selection of authentic vehicle licences – including the Lister marque and the Noble M12 – and real-world racetracks, ranging from Hockenheim and Monza to Sebring and Rockingham, with plenty to unlock on the way.





In terms of graphics and handling models, *TIR* stands up well against the rest of the driving game pack, but its developer hopes distinctive AI will really set it apart. It's certainly an approach that many other titles would benefit from (Xbox shots)





As is de rigueur, the game features a host of authentic licences and environments to add to t sense of atmosphere engineered by the game's

Speedball: Brutal Deluxe II

Format: **GBA**
Publisher: **Crawfish**
Developer: **Wannadoo**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Summer**

Amidst the next-gen clamour for information on the Bitmap's Speedball Arena, it's good to hear something familiar. "Ice cream, ice cream..."



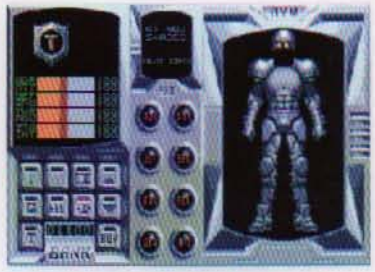
I t's the game that made the Bitmap Brothers reputation, offering sport, comic-book brutality, and simple digital one-button fun. More than that, though, it offered the opportunity to savagely humiliate peers in a variety of ways. Score 100 points in each half, shimmy and twist and light all the stars, see their star striker stretched off and all their pre-game bragging dissipate like so much hot air. This, the GBA version of the home computer classic, contains all the features you'd expect to emerge from a direct port. Why would it need anything else?

There are slight differences, though. There's a little more colour in the sheen of the sprites' metal costumes, and the flight and weight of the ball is certainly different to the home computer version – it's much more difficult to hit the stars from distance, and the ball won't roll as far when it's on the floor. Whether that's a decision Crawfish have taken because of the limited view onscreen, or whether it's something that's arisen naturally during the translation is irrelevant; it's that clear veteran *Speedball* players won't be immediately at home here, and will have to alter tactics appropriately. For example, it doesn't appear to be possible to charge it off the electric shock rebounder and straight into the goal anymore, and that may irritate those who used that particular tactic as part of their humiliation routine.



The goalkeepers' AI appears a little suspect at times, but then they were never the smartest of two-dimensional creatures. Still, it's one-on-one competition that retrogamers will be anticipating



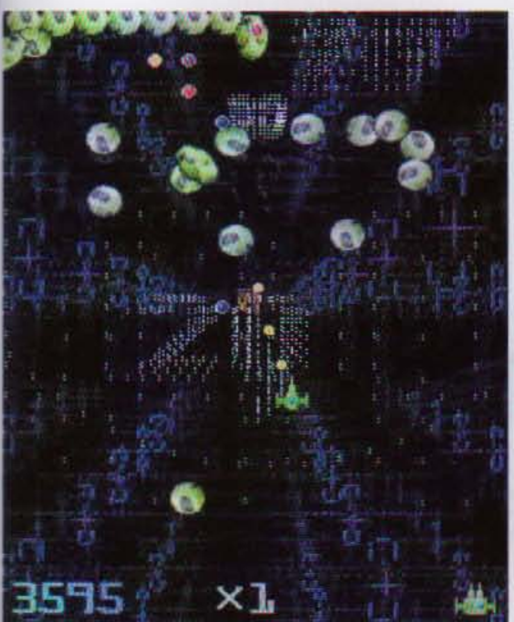


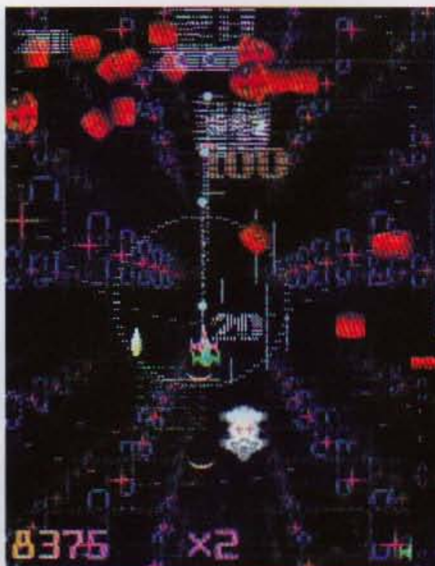
Collect the coins on the pitch and you'll get the chance to upgrade your team afterwards, or to buy one of the memorably illustrated star players

Grid Runner ++

Format: **PPC**
Publisher: **Llamasoft**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **September**

Jeff Minter, a man well versed in that art of inflicting digital ocular disorientation, brings you yet more dizzyness with another wired remake







Lavish? No, but *GR++* marks a return to the dizzyingly intense twitch gaming that made *T3K* so hypnotic

J eff Minter's range of Llamasoft-branded Pocket PC titles is set to expand by one in coming months, with the release of *Grid Runner ++*, a modern but faithful interpretation of his own '83 C64 shooter. Essentially a vertical scrolling shooter with free movement and elements of *Centipede*, *Grid Runner* has no plot or subtlety, but some nice gimmicks. Snaking enemies leave pods behind them that, if they're not destroyed within a few seconds, burst into horizontal and vertical lasers. Lasers can trigger other pods, meaning that momentarily distracted players can find themselves penned inside a tight grid of psychedelic space laser death. Hence the title, **Edge** presumes.

Neatly, too, there is no fire button; the ship follows the player's pointer, automatically spitting out glowing lasers. While hardcore shoot 'em up fans may balk at the potential loss of digital precision, it's a surprisingly natural control method, and will particularly suit mouse-obsessed PC FPS fans. It's to be hoped more of them break away from 3D realism and give this a shot, because it's typical Minter – as beautifully abstract as you would expect, as obtusely bestial as you feared – and a shareware release seems imminent. And after that? Simple. **Edge** wants *Tempest Cubed*, and so, according to his statements on the **Edge** forum, does Minter.

Border Down

Format: Arcade
Publisher: G.rev
Developer: In-house
Origin: Japan
Release: Autumn

If the developer and the game are new, the concept certainly isn't. But like most traditional videogamers, Edge's love of a 2D shoot 'em up will never die





The fact that G.rev's first coin-op title is a two-dimensional shooter is unlikely to send a tsunami around the globe. The relative newcomer to Japan's developer scene is, after all, made up of former Taito staff responsible for members of the *RayStorm* and *G-Darius* family so its heritage is at least assured.

Running on Naomi hardware, the controls are based around just two buttons: the Main Shot (which offers five power levels) and a Break Laser function. The latter's usage is not only limited (a power gauge fills up throughout the game) it also influences the Main Shot's level so that an overreliance on Break Laser fire weakens your ship's principal weapon.

The game's name is taken from one of the central concepts. Before embarking on your mission you select one of three Border modes (green, yellow or red), subsequently determining your starting point, the opposition you'll face, number of credits (three, two, one respectively) as well as the difficulty level. Predictably, the tougher the challenge, the bigger the points reward. Depending on your performance, it is possible to move from one Border mode to a lower one during play (hence the title).

Console conversions, particularly to Dreamcast, are expected by the end of the year at which point **Edge** will take a closer look.





Two-dimensional play dressed up in three-dimensional visuals. *Border Down* isn't the first one to toy with the concept but the developer should ensure a mix of traditional and novel ideas. A DC version should be straightforward

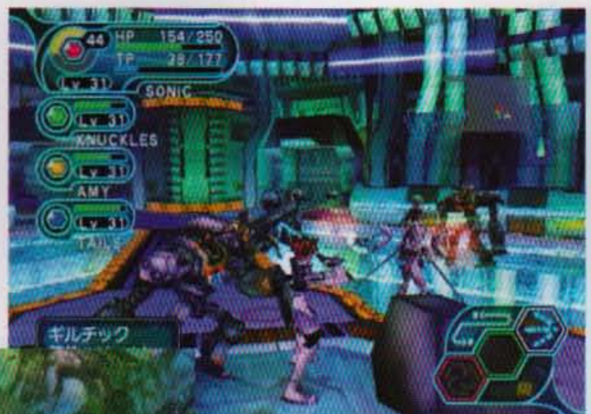
Phantasy Star Online

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team
Origin: Japan
Release: August (Japan), TBC (UK)

Sonic Team commences beta testing of a GameCube instalment in a series that's increasingly proving essential to online console penetration

The recently commenced beta test of the GameCube version of Yuji Naka's online opus allowed 20,000 users (**Edge** among them) to get a clearer idea of how successfully the community spirit of Dreamcast Ragol will translate to Nintendo's hardware. Installing the necessary 56k modem (which comes included with the game) is as easy as fitting the N64 memory expansion pack, and though Japanese users might be more familiar with the speed of ADSL, it proves fast and responsive, with little lag. The specially designed keyboard, which also comes with the package, requires the use of two joyports, but it does expand the available interface by allowing keyboard shortcuts.

The opening menu screen presents two play modes, online and offline (which can be played by up to four players, splitscreen). With no hard drive, getting online requires saving information to a memory card – each player can store up to four characters, unlike the Dreamcast version. Two identification numbers and a password later, and players can choose from the original Dreamcast campaign, or missions unique to GameCube, with the focus still resolutely fixed on levelling up, acquiring items and partaking of an unsurpassed sense of community. It's not a massive technical overhaul, but the sense of social participation remains, and the GameCube-specific additions work well.





Despite the differences between the GameCube and Dreamcast controllers, the sense of control remains intact, though the interface has also been enhanced. The visual lobbies and division of servers into easily negotiated blocks remains





Nintendo's 56k modem acquits itself well, even compared to the ADSL connections that Japane[se] gamers are used to. There's little in the way of la[g]

Prescreen Alphas
This month's announcements and updates...

Dino Crisis 3

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house



Set in the outer limits of space, new dinosaurs face a team of intergalactic marines who, thanks to jetpacks, can quickly negotiate environments

Spiralstone

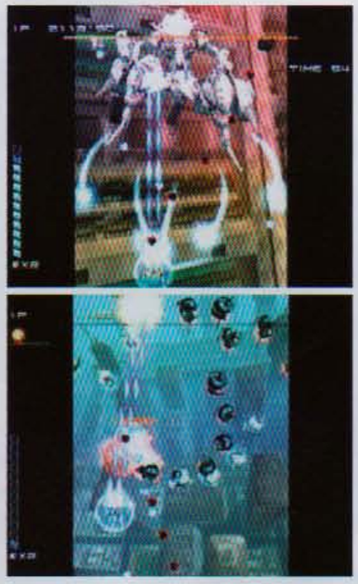
Format: GBA
Publisher: TBA
Developer: Gatehouse Games



The RPG from a group of ex-Core coders has realtime combat, a refreshing change from *Golden Sun* et al. Expect a prescreen next issue

Ikaruga

Format: DC
Publisher: ESP
Developer: Treasure



While sources inform **Edge** that a GC version is also planned, the Japanese date for the sequel to *Radiant Silvergun* is finally set: September 5

Star Trigon

Format: Arcade
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-house



From the creator of *Mr Driller* comes another quirky arcade puzzle game, boasting equally colourful and interestingly idiosyncratic visuals

Indy Racing League

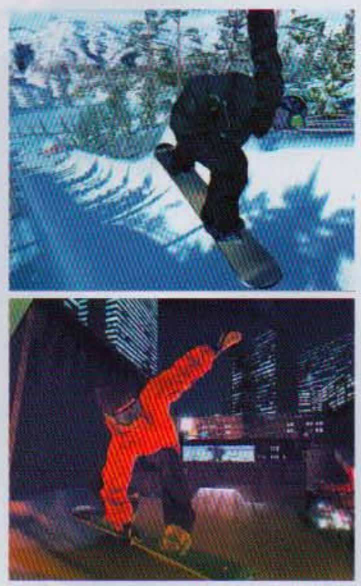
Format: PS2, PC, Xbox
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Brain in a Jar



Officially licensed and undertaken by the team responsible for the now defunct *F360 Challenge*, expect something special. But not before 2003

TransWorld Snowboarding

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Infogrames
Developer: Housemarque



Screenshots continue to do this proud, but it's essential that the quality of the gameplay matches the graphics if it's to equal *Amped*

Rygar: The Lost Adventure

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: In-house



New screens for the latest *Rygar* episode display healthy development progress. Hopefully the game dynamic is keeping up

Way of the Samurai

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Acquire



After reaching the top spot in the sales charts when it was released in Japan, this multi-path action adventure has been picked up by Eidos









Shinobi

All action – little adventure. That's what Shinobi producer Takashi Uriu proudly boasts of the latest instalment of Sega's most famous martial arts series. Edge speaks to the man himself and gets an idea of the body counts involved

Shinobi holds fond memories for many gamers across the globe. Its mix of mysticism and platforming action was perfect for the 2D age. Arguably the franchise didn't break any new ground or usher in a new gaming paradigm, but many of the *Shinobi* titles on Mega Drive and coin-op delivered finely honed gameplay lost to newer worlds with 3D cameras. **Takashi Uriu**, producer of the new *Shinobi* game, is only too aware of the emotional cache attached to the name. "The series on Mega Drive and arcade was great. They were perfect for their time. Sega did a great job and fans enjoyed them a lot and you can't possibly think you could do better than the best."

So, there's no way the formula can be improved? "Of course, there are many great aspects to the old 2D gameplay," argues Uriu-san. "And there are things you could experience only because it was in 2D. But today's hardware is very powerful and allows you to do new things. Taking all this together, we realised it was the right time to make a new *Shinobi*. But, you know, very few people know about the Mega Drive. Most children have started with the PlayStation which means you have to satisfy two very different audiences."

But such a weight on the shoulders is eased by the continuing influence of older hands. "Nearly ten years have passed since the last version of the game was released on Mega Drive," continues Uriu-san. "But now we are facing our time. Our president, Mr Oba developed the very first one and my superior Mr Ito was the director for the second version. So these two men are looking at me making the sequel. It is like father and grandfather looking after their son or grandson. It is not easy. Many members of the original team still work at the company and at OverWorks, so I'm able to get tons of advice."

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **OverWorks**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4**



Wall-walking and giant leaps across rooftops should give the game a grace and style missing from the 2D incarnations. Only a dodgy camera can fail *Shinobi* at this stage. Watch this space

Bridge the gap

Importantly, the code **Edge** has experienced already shows that the ten-year gap is being bridged with some deftness. The fluidity of movement in the main character is particularly noteworthy. While the left stick controls movement, the right swiftly rotates the camera and the view of the playfield remains in the player's control at all times. A standard attack, jump, dash and shuriken throw are performed with the four main DualShock buttons. L1 centres the cameras while R1 locks-on to nearby enemies.

Control mechanics lecture over – *Shinobi* is already playing like a class













There will be cut-scenes but hopefully (Hideo Kojima aside) they will be treated with typical Japanese economy. We can probably expect a doting female and a gruff hero, then

Shinobi's most impressive feat is combining attacks in a balletic fashion. Several opponents can be taken out while the hero adopts a ghost trace around them

act, with the emphasis firmly on fluid action and impressive combos. The lock-on and dash features are a core element of the gameplay: string several attacks together and a ghost trace follows your hero around the screen, and striking an enemy unawares is more efficient than a



"I missed the fun we had during the Mega Drive and Super Famicom days when you had gigantic bosses. What I want to input into Shinobi is pure action"

frontal assault. Chain successfully and a kanji gauge appears on the top right of the display to indicate the strength of the combo. Well executed cut-scenes show the devastation you have just reaped, with the hero sliding his weapon back into place while enemies fall to pieces (literally) around him. Chained attacks cause victims to appear onscreen, dark and petrified as if time is suspended. The effect can be quite awe-inspiring.

Uriu-san's penchant for pure action is evident in everything he says. "Many people are speaking about action/adventure games but to me, current titles are offering 40 per cent action and 60 per cent adventure. I don't think that is really enjoyable, so we decided to set the balance to 80/20 for *Shinobi*. There are tons of characters in the game, but I can't reveal to you what kind of character you will be able to play in addition to the main one. Of course, every stage ends with a boss – I missed the fun we had during the Mega Drive and Super Famicom days when you had very surprising stage structure and gigantic bosses. In today's games we have cool characters but there is something missing. What I want to input into *Shinobi* is pure action."

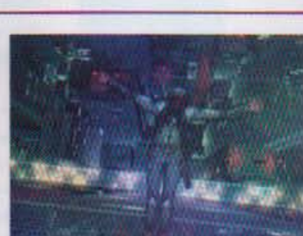
Weapons and magic abilities are sure to spice up the standard attacks. The hero's main katana will have extra properties which evolve as the game progresses. Metal pins, attached to

The dramatic movie footage shown at E3 depicted *Shinobi*'s hero breaking his fall from a helicopter by striking a skyscraper with his katana. Originally the building had split in half. This was altered due to sensitivities over September 11





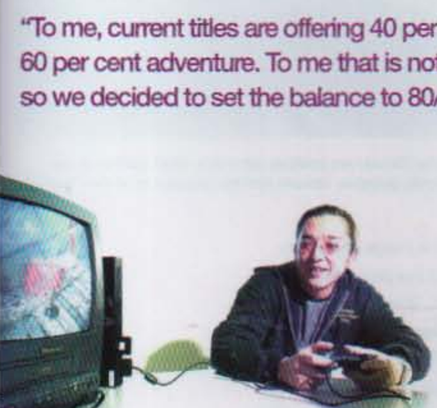








"To me, current titles are offering 40 per cent action and 60 per cent adventure. To me that is not really enjoyable, so we decided to set the balance to 80/20 for Shinobi"

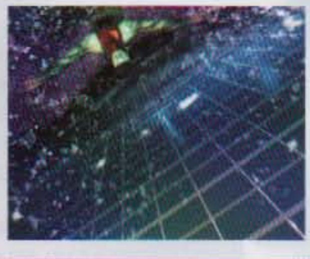


Takashi Uriu
producer

Photography: Hiroki Izumi















The locations in *Shinobi* are beautiful, proving that PlayStation2 development is beginning to mature

the forearms can also be propelled at enemies like shuriken. Ninjitsu magic powers round off the impressive arsenal, though Uriu-san wants to keep these a secret because they constitute a large part of the discovery and excitement of the title.

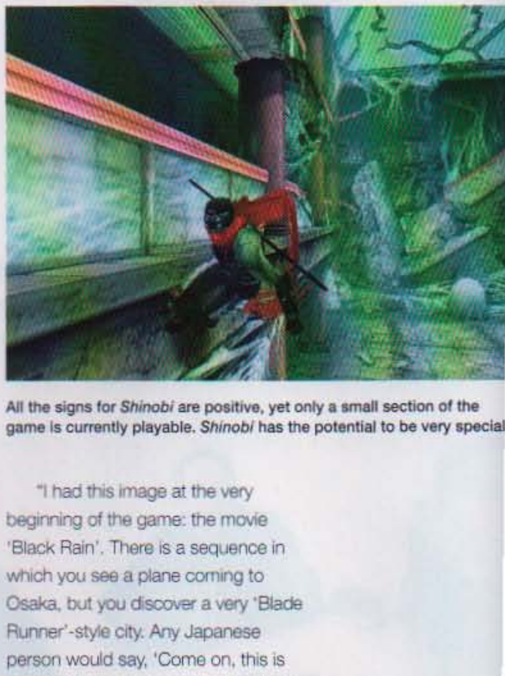
Although impressive in essence, *Shinobi*'s good name may be tarnished if a quality 3D camera fails to make the final cut. Predictably Uriu-san is confident that he has cracked the problem. "Like *Zelda* you can lock on to your enemy, so your character turns around him. We designed the hero's attacks with the lock-on feature always in mind. Regarding game speed, I was not satisfied by the games currently on the market, so we gave the character a very high motion speed. We spent a lot of time adjusting the game balance so the speed would be used properly during the game and would actually become one of the player's tools when facing the opposition. You may be surprised by what kind of cool actions you can perform."



Although no details are forthcoming about the magic, Uriu-san promises startling visual effects and a system that will be integral to the gameplay. He wants to remain true to the *Shinobi* spirit

Taste of America

First mooted for the Dreamcast, *Shinobi* has spent a long time in the mind of its new visionary. Quoting 'The Matrix' and 'Blade' as inspirations, Uriu-san's philosophy for the game is refreshingly simple: make it fun. But the American films are important for another reason. "At OverWorks we were conscious that we could not go anywhere by remaining with a Japanese direction. There is some difference between Japan and the US and the gap is not easy to fill. So we brought the idea to the US to learn how Americans would see the game. Then we came back to Japan, readjusted it to Japanese taste and returned to America again, and so on.

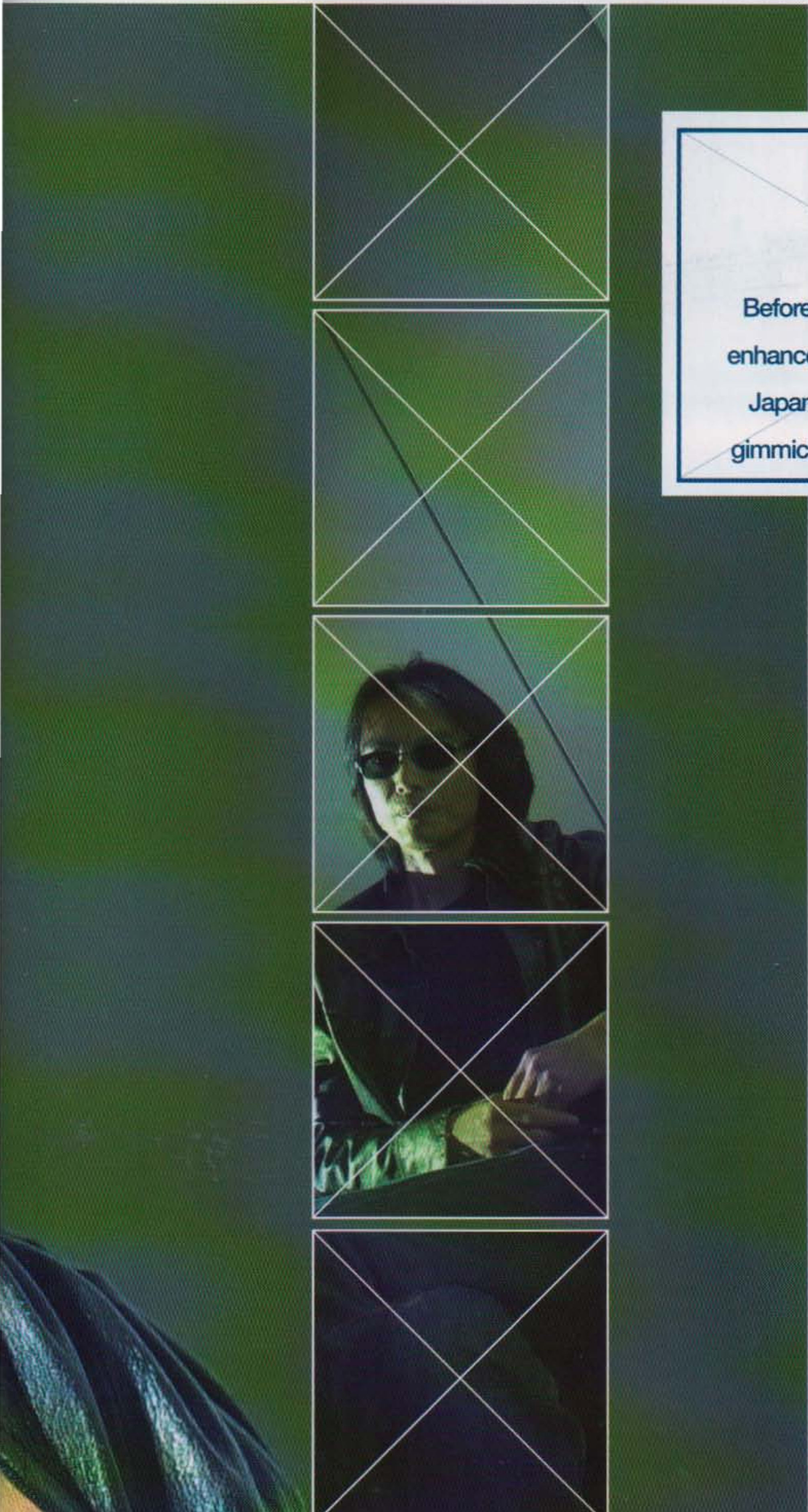


All the signs for *Shinobi* are positive, yet only a small section of the game is currently playable. *Shinobi* has the potential to be very special

"I had this image at the very beginning of the game: the movie 'Black Rain'. There is a sequence in which you see a plane coming to Osaka, but you discover a very 'Blade Runner'-style city. Any Japanese person would say, 'Come on, this is not Osaka at all,' but you realise that this is how Americans see it. This gap served as an illustration for my team in order to understand the difference between both cultures."

Present evidence certainly suggests that such attention to detail is paying off. *Shinobi* is due for release towards the end of the year in Japan and all the signs point to the franchise being in very good hands indeed.





Inside...

Tecmo

Before Dead or Alive (complete with optional enhancements) Tecmo was little known outside Japan. But is the company built on a pair of gimmicks alone? Edge goes inside to reveal all

There's a fine line between an artistic nude and pornography. Often it's more a case of paper quality and staple placement than anything else. So when Tecmo decided to build in a breast bounce option into *Dead or Alive* (by increasing the age of the character in the options screen) it raised a few eyebrows. The moral police asked questions about the suitability of such content for teenagers: harmless entertainment or chauvinistic titillation. And that's before we even broach the subject of unlockable gym slips for Ayane. Although **Edge** remains opposed to videogame censorship, the *Dead or Alive* franchise has certainly challenged the boundaries of taste in games.

But *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* producer, **Itagaki Tomonobu**, remains resolute in his quest to sex up the videogame industry. First, bouncing breasts. Now, dressing characters in bikinis. **Edge** caught up with the Russ Meyer of the videogame world at Tecmo's Team Ninja building in Tokyo to talk about his volleyball project and the new martial arts extravaganza, *Ninja Gaiden*.

What persuaded you to do a volleyball game based around characters from a beat 'em up?
Hmm... don't you think it's cool? I think people say I'm an 'eccentric' creator. Many are always asking me, "Why, why, why?" I put a hint in the very first video of *DoA3* on Xbox but it looks like nobody got it. You had this beautiful beach with a young woman in a bikini on it. I wanted to tell everybody I was working on a different title.

The very first time I worked on this project was when we finished *DoA2* for PS2, back in March 2000. There were many offers for our title from the west and some of our clients asked to include a DoA Ball mode, like Tekken Ball. I wanted to keep a good relationship with them but when I don't think something is good for the game, I don't want to do it. I don't want people to think that I'm not confident in the main mode and just add bonuses instead.

Photography: **Hiroki Izumi**













Two weeks of bliss on a tropical island full of beach babes. Tomonobu-san's new game is clearly a labour of love. Win matches and your girls can be treated to a number of items including hats and bikinis. But choose wisely: some girls can get very self conscious

This is something I hate. I would take the blame if the main mode isn't good. So I told them I wouldn't do this. Now, I asked myself that if I had to make a DoA Ball game, well, why not make something great? Then, I realised it would become something... surprising? I mean cool. When I decided to make *DoA3* on Xbox, I felt this would be the right time to resume the DoA Ball project.

Are you planning to include any male characters or do you just like bouncing breasts?

No, female characters only. I mean this is obvious. There would be no meaning in adding male characters.

these two young women. But again, your present may be rejected and simply thrown into the rubbish. The psychology and tastes of each character is very developed. It is only a sport game but there is also a big simulation side.

You may desire, for example, Katsumi to wear one given type of bikini but she may really hate it. There are no play modes, it's a case of going through all the activities on the island map. In terms of common play modes, you would have the main mode and the Versus mode. I'm thinking about a fourplayer mode but this not a party game. I would prefer it so that one player can enjoy the game quietly. But this is a sport for which you could easily include a Versus mode.

"I would like people to enjoy looking at these girls playing. They will move naturally and this is the major enjoyment of the game"

How does the structure of the game work? What different modes are there?

Well, you stay on the island for two weeks and each time of day is significant: morning, midday, evening and night. You play in these various conditions and get some money to spend on backgrounds or characters. You also have a casino. The interaction between characters is very important. You can set your own team and choose among the characters available. However, one character might not appreciate another one, so you may get some tension sometimes. You may not access some items if you don't form a team between two particular characters.

How do the items work in the game?

Items vary according to each character. You might decide to give some accessories or items to improve the relationship between

At the start I believed that the graphics were perfect but I was afraid that beach volleyball was boring. I mean, there are very few companies making such games. When I spoke to friends about beach volleyball games, they all said it would be crap. I addressed this problem to make it fun, enjoyable.

How does the gameplay work? Have you implemented a game system that ensures players will find the game intuitive?

I think this will be quite a show. I mean, a very cool experience. At the moment, the game uses only one button to manage all the actions according to the situation. I think we will have two at the end – pass and smash. I think there will be special moves, but we are focused right now in delivering a true volleyball game. But graphics are essential and I would like to keep a good focus on the characters. If you have a







fourplayer mode, you would not be able to get closer to the character, only have a global view of the situation. This is not very fun. I would like people to enjoy looking at these girls playing. They will move naturally, very smoothly and this is the major enjoyment of this game.

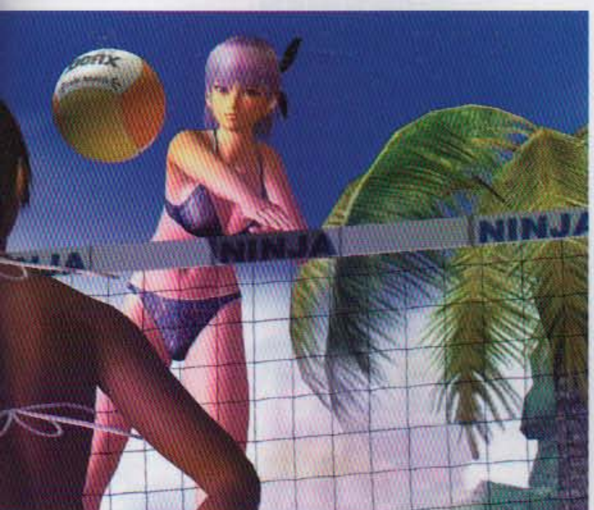
Have you had a look at Sega-AM2's *Beach Spikers*? What do you think of it and is there enough room in the market for more than one beach volleyball game?

I don't care very much. I mean, it is a coincidence if both titles are coming out. We decided to make our title and started it much sooner. It is quite an old project inside Tecmo. Both titles can't be compared. They are quite different, but I really hope they achieve something cool on GameCube.

How many volleyball arenas are there in the game? And is it just straightforward beach volleyball rules or have you included some interesting gameplay twists?

In fact, I wanted to have one single play area. But then I felt this would not be much fun so we put in several ones. The play conditions don't change, only the beauty of the surroundings. At the very beginning, when I presented my design, the designer started to make a kind of stadium. I told him to stop. I made him erase the stadium. I wanted something close to the idea of a paradise. Why put in poles to hold the net? There is no need. I told the designer to use palm trees instead. This is a 'casual' game – very relaxing.

We decided to take the American rules, based on a two-versus-two configuration. This is more suitable for a videogame. I won't get too deep into some of the rules to keep it easily understandable. There are eight characters, seven from *DoA3* and one new character. I'm thinking about using this new face for the sequel to *DoA3*. Of course, this will depend on how players welcome her.





FAQ

Company name: Tecmo
Founded: 1967
HQ: Tokyo
Number of employees: 666 (no, really)
Projects in development: *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, *Ninja Gaiden*

Itagaki Tomonobu
producer





Hmm... the resemblance to Sega's *Shinobi* is marked, but Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* has been in development for some time. The winner of the ninja title will surely come down to fluidity and ease of controls

First released in the arcades in 1988, *Ninja Gaiden* (called *Shadow Warriors* in Europe due to the censorship standard of the time) soon developed a cult following. Although hero Ryo Hayabusa appeared in NES, Master System and Lynx versions – not to mention a guest appearance in *Dead or Alive* – Tecmo has let the brand wane over the last decade. Until now. Returning in 3D and with all new abilities, *Ninja Gaiden* is set to give Sega's *Shinobi* an epic duel in 2002.

Why are you bringing back *Ninja Gaiden* now? Does it have any connection to the previous versions?

We are just at the time where we are able to show something. In fact, the project started long ago, in 1999. We initiated the development while were working on the *DoA* series. We started it on an arcade board, the Naomi. Of course, we intended to release it on a console but, as you know, at Team Ninja we can handle any hardware.

How have you been able to keep the spirit of the original while translating it into 3D?

Hmm… the producer of the previous *Ninja Gaiden* is actually my boss and the executive producer is our chairman. So, inside Tecmo, there are only two people left who know about the original series' spirit. I have been told to not make the sequel too Japanese. No, really. I've been at Tecmo for ten years now. My boss has been here for 15 or 16 years and our chairman for more than 30 years. You must understand their generation is very different. We can still keep the spirit of the original game.

In my view, it was the 'violence' of the action that made *Ninja Gaiden* so good. So you might consider this 'sequel' as a very new *Ninja Gaiden* – a new start. I have been working in the 3D environment from the very beginning… there has been *Donkey Kong Country*, this game offering prerendered 3D graphics applied into 2D. Well, at that time, I was already working on 3D. But… it was not a very famous game. Its title was *Football Fighter*. It is my famous setback.

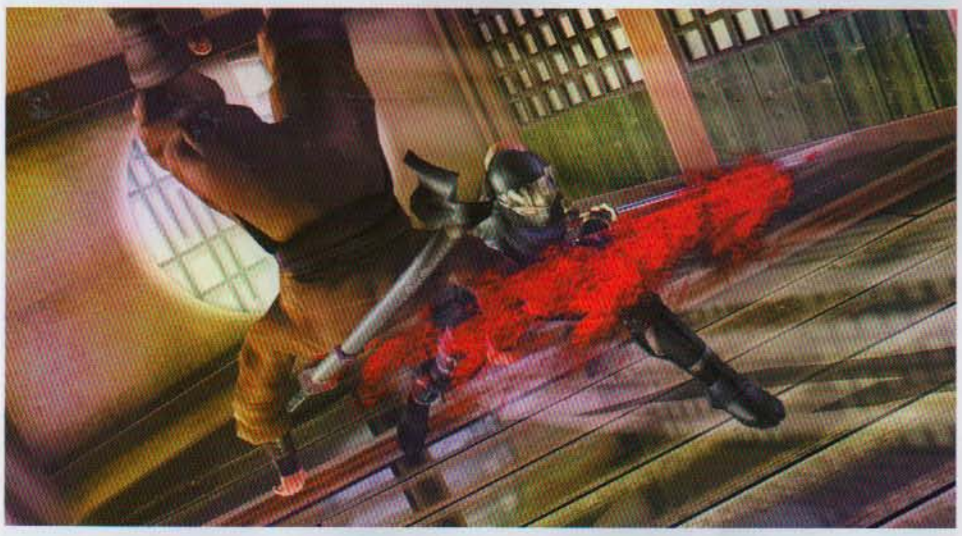
How have you adapted the controls for the 3D environment?

Hmm… to handle the environment, the game uses most of the controller buttons and that could make it a little difficult to control at the very beginning. When you look at other games such as *Halo*, the controls are quite difficult. In that sense, *Ninja Gaiden* is made very much for the west. It is quite hard, with many functions and a higher level of difficulty.

How many weapons can the player expect?

The main weapon is the Japanese katana. This is one weapon. Then you have two types of shuriken. Then you can have some powerful techniques like the ninjitsu. Since there is nothing stronger than the katana, you can't do much in terms of modifications, so people might feel bored. Therefore I'm in the process finding a way to change that. Perhaps keeping the katana as it is but adding a feature that would make it evolve through the game.

"Ninja Gaiden is made very much for the west. It is quite hard, with many functions and a higher level of difficulty"



The traditional katana will be the main weapon, though throwing stars and ninjitsu magic skills will bolster offensive abilities. Tomonobu-san is currently toying with the idea of making the katana evolve through several stages. Blood features heavily

How will the combat work?

We have a lock-on system. We have been working on this game since '99 and all the features have been in since then. However, we are trying several things to improve some of them or finding the perfect balance. We are working hard on the camera. The lock-on system is important for the camera. We would like to offer players new angles and new ways to enjoy the action onscreen. We want the action to be very easy to follow.

I'm a big fan of this kind of game. For example, *Zelda* on N64 is an action puzzle game to me. It's great fun. Capcom's games are also fun – but not *Devil May Cry*, no, more *Onimusha 2*. I think this title is superior to *Devil May Cry* as a game experience. Today's 3D action games are just making the environment scroll under the character's feet. If you really want to deliver a 3D experience, you have to make the game handle the three directions: X, Y and Z. This is one of our goals.







Do you see Sega's *Shinobi* as a rival?
Back to *Dead or Alive 3* – there were many fighting games at that time. Now we find a similar situation with ninja titles. Why does this happen? What do I think about Sega's *Shinobi* on PS2? It is another interesting revival beside Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden*. Yes, I have been very surprised I don't know why ninjas have such an interest now. We have been working on our title for years now. Plus we announced our game years before, starting at the PlayStation2 announcement.

Now, comparing titles is not simple. If you consider fighting games, well they are all fighting games competing on a single narrow section of the market. The competition is hard. In the case of action games, you are evolving in a much wider and diverse market so the comparison is meaningless.

Were the old *Shinobi* games an influence?
No, I have not been able to enjoy the original game. I was not a very big fan of the Super Famicom. I loved the Mega Drive. In the same way, I had a SG-1000 instead of the Famicom (NES). Why? I could not explain. I just loved the games on this platform. On Mega Drive there was *Super Shinobi*. The Genesis was very successful in the US, but in Japan, the Super Famicom was mighty – the mainstream.

To have a Mega Drive at that time was like belonging to the 'Other Side', no, not the 'Dark Side'. So I heard about this legendary title called *Super Shinobi* but there was no way of getting hold of a copy. Everybody was keeping it, so there were no copies in the second-hand market. There weren't a lot of copies made so this quickly became a game for fanatics. However, I had my revenge with *Shadow Dancer* on the Mega Drive. I spent so many hours on it that I'm sure I was far more skilled on this game than the team that made it at Sega.

How do you ensure that the character moves fluidly?
We are confident in our ability to handle any hardware but we are also very confident in our 3D skill, including the motion issue. The goal is to get characters moving smoothly and speedily at the same time.

The balance is not easy to get. If you are not serious in your work, you get fast movement but poor motions. We have a lot of experience. I mean, you can just have a look on what we did on the *DoA* series. I'm very confident on this matter so I can concentrate on the game design itself. I believe *Ninja Gaiden* is very cool in this way.

A lot of people at E3 compared *Ninja Gaiden* to *Devil May Cry*. Do you think this is fair?
Hmm… who cares? If one action game is cool and fun, that's all. I like *Devil May Cry* and enjoyed the *Onimusha* series as well. But to be honest, *Ninja Gaiden* is a very different title. I think our game system will be different, as well as the way you are going to experience it. In Capcom's games, you have an immediate reaction to your action so you enjoy them at each instant. In *Ninja Gaiden*, the fun comes not only when you kill your enemies but also by moving the character. We are particularly proud of the action coupled to the controls.

How is the game structured?
There is one single world and you have save points but I can't say how many hours it will take to finish. If it was down to me I would make it last for just a couple of hours. Yes, we like intense experiences. I think it would be fabulous to enjoy an entire game in only one hour.

Will you include additional play modes and minigames?
It is something we used to do but we reduced these bonus elements in *DoA3*. It reached a point where it was simply too much. I mean there were about 13 of them and if we kept the pace we would have reached 50. With *Ninja Gaiden* I would like people to be satisfied with the main mode as the 'main dish'. I always think adding these bonus features feels a bit like hiding a poor or disappointing main mode.









Current 'screenshots' hint that *Ninja Gaiden* will marry Japanese history with futuristic weaponry. Tecmo's decision to concentrate on the 'main dish' rather than hundreds of sub-games is laudable

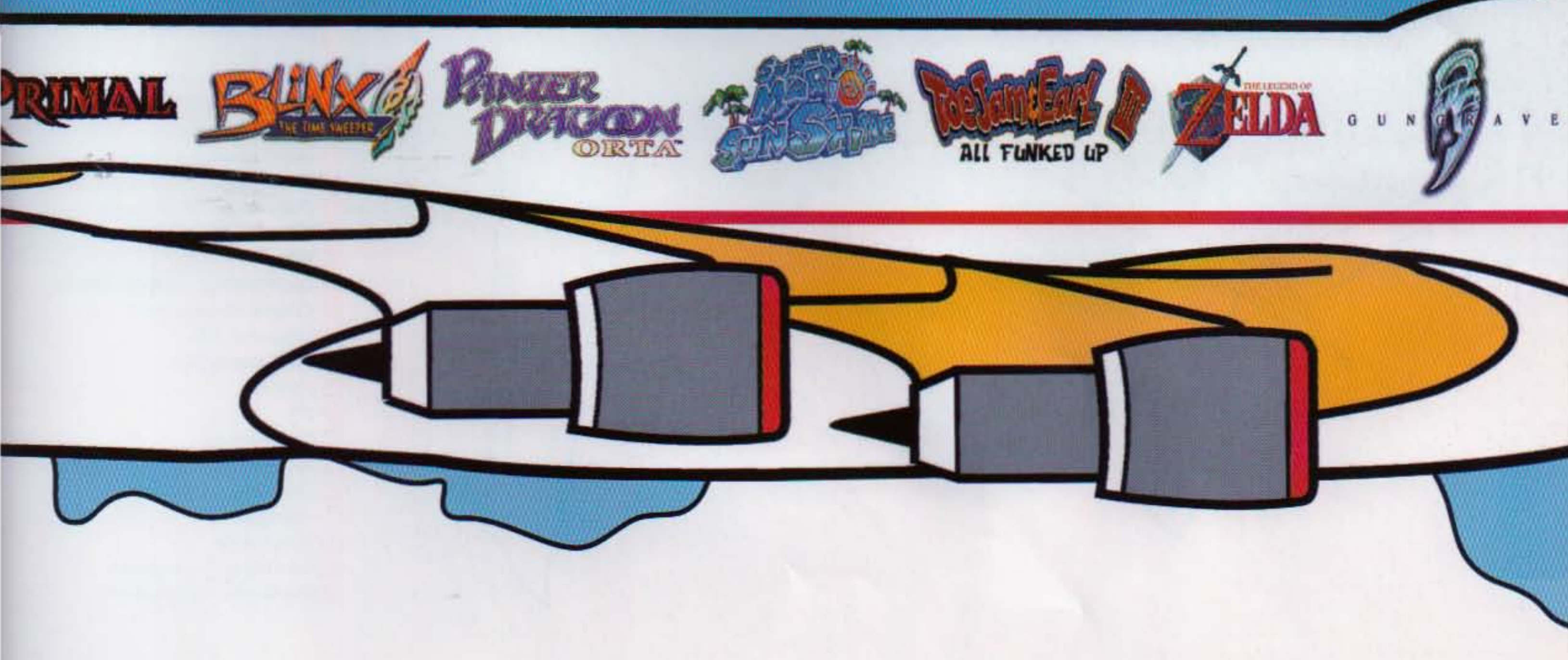
mile high club

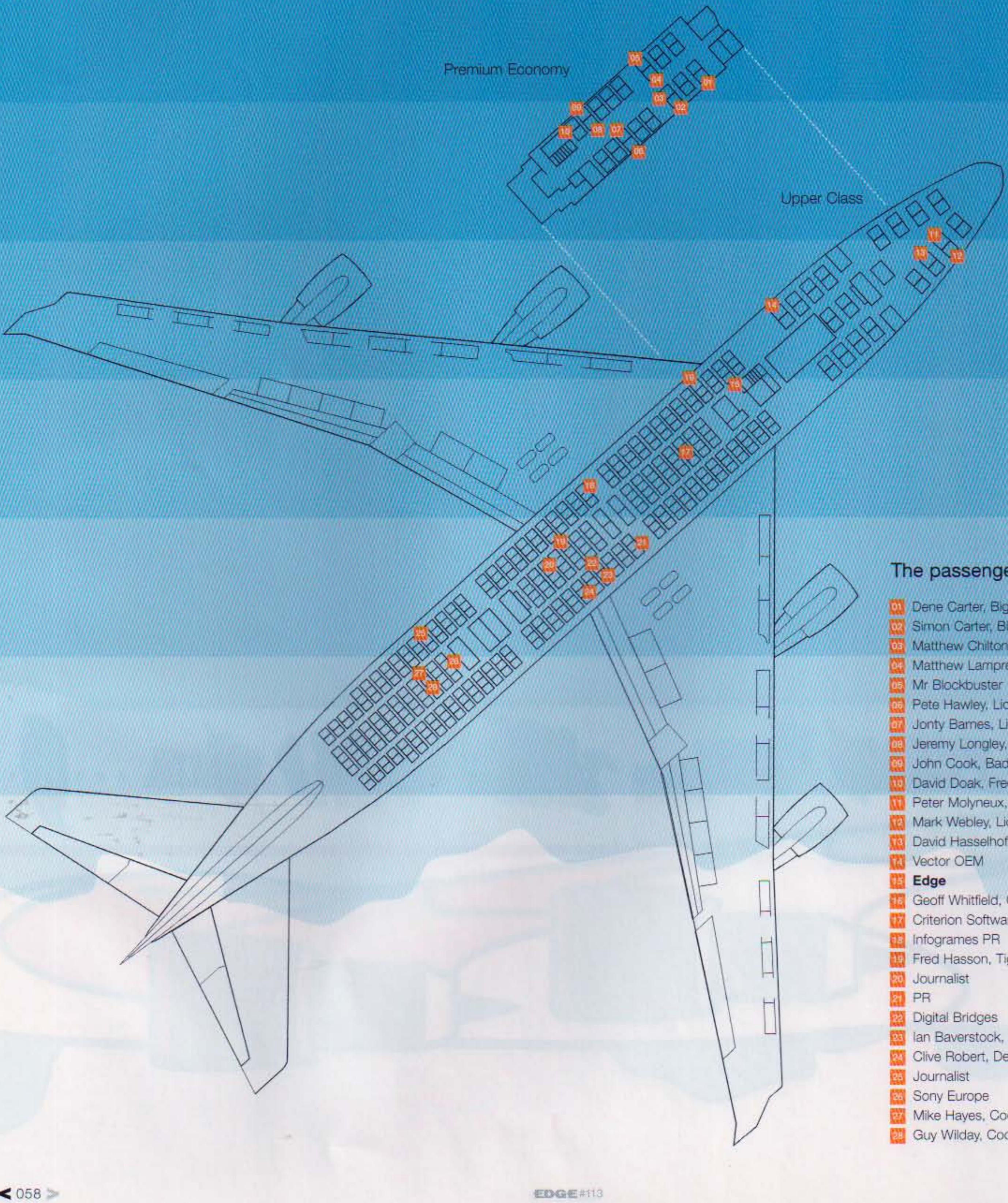


If you're not a game developer, never catch the midday Virgin LA flight out of Heathrow on the week of the E3 expo. For **Edge** however, it's the ideal place to catch up with some of the UK's finest as they relax at 34,000 feet

Monday May 20, 8.45am, Heathrow Terminal 3. It starts with a trickle. There's a shifty-looking character behind you in the check-in line. The giveaway sign is an *I-War* holdall. Next, a group of pasty stubbly sorts brush past. Out of the corner of your eye you spot one is wearing a *Psyback* t-shirt. They try to blend in, pretending to be normal, but there's no way game developers can just melt into the background. Everything about their upbringing and employment pulls them in the opposite direction.

Suddenly, or so it seems, they are everywhere. Isn't that Dene Carter, one half of the gaming goth revival (also co-founder of Lionhead satellite Big Blue Box) hanging out? If so, the person he's talking to must be **Jonty Barnes**, one of the bright Lionhead massive. And is that Matthew Chilton, of Molyneux's secret Intrepid project sitting in the corner of a dark duty-free bar talking shop to someone who looks like... and so it goes on. Like a scene in an 'Evil Dead' movie you're surrounded. Well, maybe you shouldn't have caught the plane that even developers joke is the flight which if it crashed would wipe out half of the UK games industry.





The passengers

01 Dene Carter, Big Blue Box
02 Simon Carter, Big Blue Box
03 Matthew Chilton, Intrepid
04 Matthew Lamprell, Joytech
05 Mr Blockbuster
06 Pete Hawley, Lionhead Studios
07 Jonty Barnes, Lionhead Studios
08 Jeremy Longley, Lost Toys
09 John Cook, Bad Management
10 David Doak, Free Radical Design
11 Peter Molyneux, Lionhead Studios
12 Mark Webley, Lionhead Studios
13 David Hasselhoff, 'Baywatch'
14 Vector OEM
15 **Edge**
16 Geoff Whitfield, Criterion Software
17 Criterion Software block
18 Infogrames PR
19 Fred Hasson, Tiga
20 Journalist
21 PR
22 Digital Bridges
23 Ian Baverstock, Kuju Entertainment
24 Clive Robert, Deep Red
25 Journalist
26 Sony Europe
27 Mike Hayes, Codemasters
28 Guy Wilday, Codemasters

"I've been so busy getting ready for E3, I haven't had the chance to think about what I'm looking forward to," muses Lionhead's Jonty Barnes, as **Edge** interrupts him for a brief chat while he quietly watches Russell Crowe going through the motions in 'A Beautiful Mind'. "It's strange because we're going to LA – how cool is that! – but because we're demoing our games in a hotel room, we may as well be in a large air-conditioned room in Manchester." Barnes grimaces. "The only time we'll get off is during the flight over, and the meal tonight after we get in."

Yes, E3 may be the maddest, baddest, most insane videogame show in the world but, for the developers at least, it's something to be feared. Not only do they sweat blood to get their demos finished – stories are legion of developers actually coding on the flight to E3 (two years ago Demis Hassabis' Elixir Studio even booked a seat for their demo PC) – but once they arrive their days are taken up demoing to journalists, who never arrive to their appointments on time. And are hung over. When it's all over, the developers need a holiday.

Jez Longley and his agent John Cook, of Bad Management are sitting directly in front of Doak too. "What am I doing here?" Longley thinks out loud to **Edge**'s opening question. "I'm getting pissed on this fucking flight somewhere over the Atlantic at 34,00 feet, he stoutly replies." So far, so good.

"Jez has just shown me the teaser for his game, *Battle Engine Aquila*," interrupts Doak. "It's pretty damn teasing, so I'm looking forward to seeing that if I can blow out a few appointments," he says shaking his head. "It's good to meet people at E3," re-interrupts Longley. "Though I seem to have met half the world on this flight already."

Window shopping

Perhaps one reason why the E3 flights are interesting is that they provide the UK games industry with a nine-hour window to catch up with the latest news – if, of course, it can be bothered to leave its seat. As well as game developers, the flight is also packed with plenty of other industry types, including a very bubbly representative of peripheral company Joytech, a shy buyer from





With a nine-hour flight, many were desperately guarding their GBAs

"What am I doing here? I'm getting pissed on this fucking flight somewhere over the Atlantic at 34,00 feet"

One fella with good reason for his ambivalent attitude to the next three days is Free Radical Design's **David Doak**. One of the downsides of success – *TimeSplitters2* is a high profile game showing on both the Eidos and the Sony stands – means that the boundaries of his E3 are already laid out: he has to look forward to 81 12-minute-long press appointments. Lucky man.

"This is a bit weird," he points out, as **Edge** inexpertly attempts to take his photo. "I feel like a rock star." Well, at least he's enjoying the luxury of Virgin's premium economy class travel. For some unknown reason – maybe game developers are doing much better than we imagine – the upper bulge of this 747-400 series is full of developers.

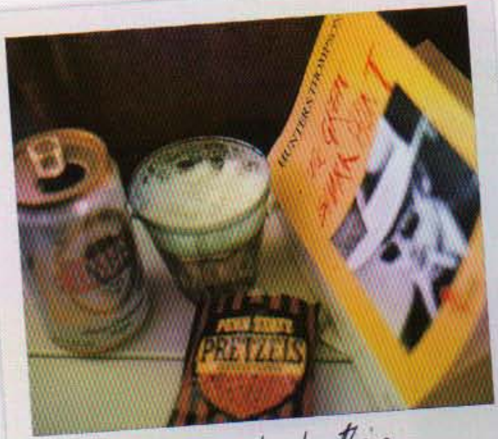
As well as Jonty Barnes, who's sitting next to Lionhead's Pete Hawley, other fellow travellers enjoying the extra legroom and neatly ironed copies of the 'FT' include the Carter brothers (Big Blue Box) and Matt Chilton (Intrepid). Lost Toys'

Blockbuster, the usual stack of PRs, the CEO of mobile gaming company Digital Bridges and the head of Vector OEM, the software bundling distributor. It's even a good place to do business, as one developer discovered last year. He managed to land a deal for £0.75m through the serendipity of seat location next to a venture capitalist.

Some industry types are happy to talk. And some are really happy to talk. "Freebies. And lots of them. Sony tickets. I'm just determined to blag Sony tickets and do it easily for once," chirps in the very bubbly representative of thirdparty peripheral manufacturer, Joytech. Not that **Alex Verrey**, aka Big Boy Barry of 'TIGS' fame, has fallen on hard times since leaving the world of TV. He now has to deal with the trauma of negotiating US customs with clay replica guns. "It's like the 'Crystal Maze,'" he continues. "Trying to get into the Sony party you have to prove yourself and chop off an arm and do DNA tests to show that you're worthy enough,



David, shortly before his clanger at the World cup



Beer and loathing at 34,000 feet

complete certain tasks and deliver the head of a pony to some guy in PR. It's the most ridiculous thing in the world just to get into the damn Sony party and I think that's one of my major missions this year."

Edge moves on... "And beautiful ladies," adds Big Boy quickly. "And many of them who just smile lovely and have their photo taken with you. Did you see the *DoA* girls last year? Were they dead or alive? Well, they were alive but they were knocking me dead, how's that? There's a line for you. I'm going to crash and burn with this interview." Until next time.

However, Doak's in no mood for talking business. "Have you seen David Hasselhoff is on the flight?" he confides. "That's the most exciting thing I've heard in a while."

And indeed it is true. The leather-trousered saviour of LA's beaches is sitting downstairs in upper class. Rumour has it that he's been in a UK recording studio working on a new German-only album with a DJ best known for his shampoo jingle. Perhaps more importantly for **Edge** readers is his proximity to the godfather of UK development Peter Molyneux. Sadly, however, they are not sitting next to each other – imagine the synergy – a 'Baywatch'-god game with slo-mo replays of huge-breasted women running down the beach combined with interstitial 'Nightrider' driving levels. Instead Molyneux is safely installed next to righthandman Mark Webley. Hasselhoff is feigning sleep and will continue to do so throughout the flight.

Instead **Edge** must move back towards the cheap seats, past the phalanx of tools developers from Criterion Software, who tellingly make up the largest single industry block on this flight, even further back than the stratified layer of PR managers from Eidos and Infogrames, back to where journalists are drawn by the combination of

"Trying to get into the Sony party you have to prove yourself and chop off an arm and do DNA tests to show that you're worthy enough"

I am a passenger...

Apart from your own games, what impressed you at E3 this year?



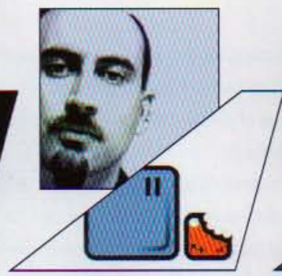
Jeremy Longley
Lost Toys
The average quality of the games on show was significantly higher than usual – but very little actually stood out. Overall the Nintendo stand contained the best stuff – *Mario*, *Zelda* and *Star Fox Adventures* all looked as though they are going to be superb.



David Doak
Free Radical Design
Monkey Ball 2 – there should be a new version every week – just need Monkey F1 and Monkey WRC minigames now. Also, Monkey Metroid Prime, Steel Monkey Battalion, Mario Monkey Spunk Sunshine, etc, etc...



Jonty Barnes
Lionhead Studios
I loved *Zelda* on the GameCube – seeing the game moving, and playing it amazed me at the effectiveness and quality of the cartoon presentation with the familiar gameplay I love. While *Doom III* equally stunned me: the visuals and sound, for the first time in a FPS, immersed me into a gaming world of monsters where I was on the edge of my seat. It was absolutely fantastic. Generally I thought the show was one of the best yet.



Dene Carter
Big Blue Box
Firstly, I was very impressed by the Xbox stand this year – they had a very solid line-up, with *Blinx* in particular standing out. I was relatively uninspired by the Sony line-up, with the notable exception of *Mark of Kri*, which was excellent fun. The Nintendo stand was interestingly polarised, with quite a few very forgettable titles sitting around the extremely impressive *Mario Sunshine*, *Zelda* and *Metroid Prime*. And, of course, *Doom III* looked very swish, even if you do need a new computer in order to play it...



Matthew Chilton
Intrepid
I'm quite in to hack 'n' slash games at the moment, and I quite enjoyed both *Mark of Kri* from Sony and *The Two Towers* from Stormfront. Along with everyone else I'm looking forward to *Metroid Prime*, too.



John Cook
Bad Management
You mean I can't mention *Battle Engine Aquila* and **Edge**'s own *Zoocube*? Okay – well the cut-scenes in *The Getaway* are the best I've ever seen in a western produced game – absolutely top stuff Sony Soho.

eye contact with the stewardesses and free booze. Back to where the prime topic of conversation is the will-they-won't-they situation of Rare.

In a year remarkably free of top-quality rumour, Rare's situation remains a Gordian knot of the most intractable kind. Some say a push from Activision not a bid from Microsoft is behind the studio's decision to go multiformat. One thing everyone is agreed on is the Stamper brothers' controlling interest is 51 per cent versus Nintendo's 49 per cent, so once current contracts are fulfilled, the studio would theoretically be able to do what it likes. One who will remain nameless claims, however, that the Stampers asking price for Rare is so high only Microsoft could possibly afford it. Remember, they don't own much intellectual property themselves, points out another industry veteran. *SabreWulf* and *BattleToads* have little cache in 2002.

Beer in hand, **Edge** must move on though. Codemasters? **Mike Hayes** and *Colin McRae* director Guy Wilday are tucked away in a corner minding their own business. "It's nice to get out of the office for a week," chirps Hayes. "And to get the cheapest flights, we're staying out for an extra two days so we'll be able to get around LA and have a few beers after the show." Someone else who'll be enjoying the CA zip code post-E3 will be Deep Red's **Clive Robert**. Out to announce that the studio will be working on Ian Livingstone's *Beach Life* game, Robert also has some R&R booked. Like several developers, he's going to spend some time in Las Vegas. "Don't tell anyone, but I'm going to see Britney Spears," he tells **Edge** conspiratorially. Don't worry Clive, our lips are sealed.

Beautiful minds

And with the flight coming to a close, there's just enough time to bump into **Ian Baverstock**. Amazingly, considering his studio Kuju has recently floated on the AIM index in London raising millions, he's not blowing the company's new found wealth on cigars, fine wines and upper class service. Back with the cattle in economy, he's fuming that the cabin crew have stopped the inflight entertainment. "I still had 20 minutes of 'A Beautiful Mind' to go," he complains. On the subject of E3 though, he's more upbeat. "The industry's got a good buzz about it this year. I'm looking forward to the show."

Ping. The seatbelt signs spring on and the nine hours of flight VS7 are coming to an end. LAX is in sight and half of the UK games industry has survived another trans-Atlantic crossing. The real work is just about to start.





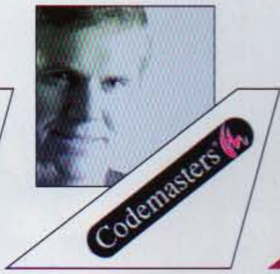
Matthew Lamprell
Joytech
I totally missed the West Hall out, therefore I can only say the standard of games in the South Hall were at an unprecedented level of excellence. Games of merit – *Doom III* was hot, the *Devil May Cry 2* demo looked awesome and the amount of people talking about the standard of Nintendo's games was overwhelming at times.



Greg Whitfield
Criterion Software
There was a lot, ranging from fun games such as *Kung Fu Chaos* (an Xbox box title, coincidentally using RenderWare Platform), *Star Wars Galaxies*, and EA's *Lord of the Rings Two Towers*, through to some 3D display technology in one of the small booths in the Kentia Hall. Mr T on the Rage stand was very cool – he hasn't changed a bit.



Fred Hasson
Tiga
Impressive (without saying whether it was good or bad) was the high visibility of the US Army, outside and inside the show as exhibitors.



Mike Hayes
Codemasters
The amount of gloss in promotional videos (with footage bearing little resemblance to the game being promoted), but very Hollywood. And Nintendo – doing it right again.



Clive Robert
Deep Red
Loved nearly everything on the Nintendo and Sony's stands but with special loving going to: *Ratchet & Clank*, *Sly Cooper*, *Vexx*, *Resident Evil*, EA's new *Sim City*, Simon & Schuster's *Sleazy Pervy Golf* (the title's not quite right but it's descriptive), not for the gameplay but for the nerve and madness of it all.



Ian Baverstock
Kuju Entertainment
There were a lot of sequels around. You have to wonder if new franchises are heading towards extinction. I personally thought there was too much cel-shading going on and that this is harder to pull off than people think – Nintendo might manage it but I wasn't convinced by *Auto Modellista* or *XIII*. I liked the beach volleyball for all the obvious reasons and the signs of a PC revival are there; the new FPSs, *Age of Mythology* and *Warcraft* will sell by the truckload.



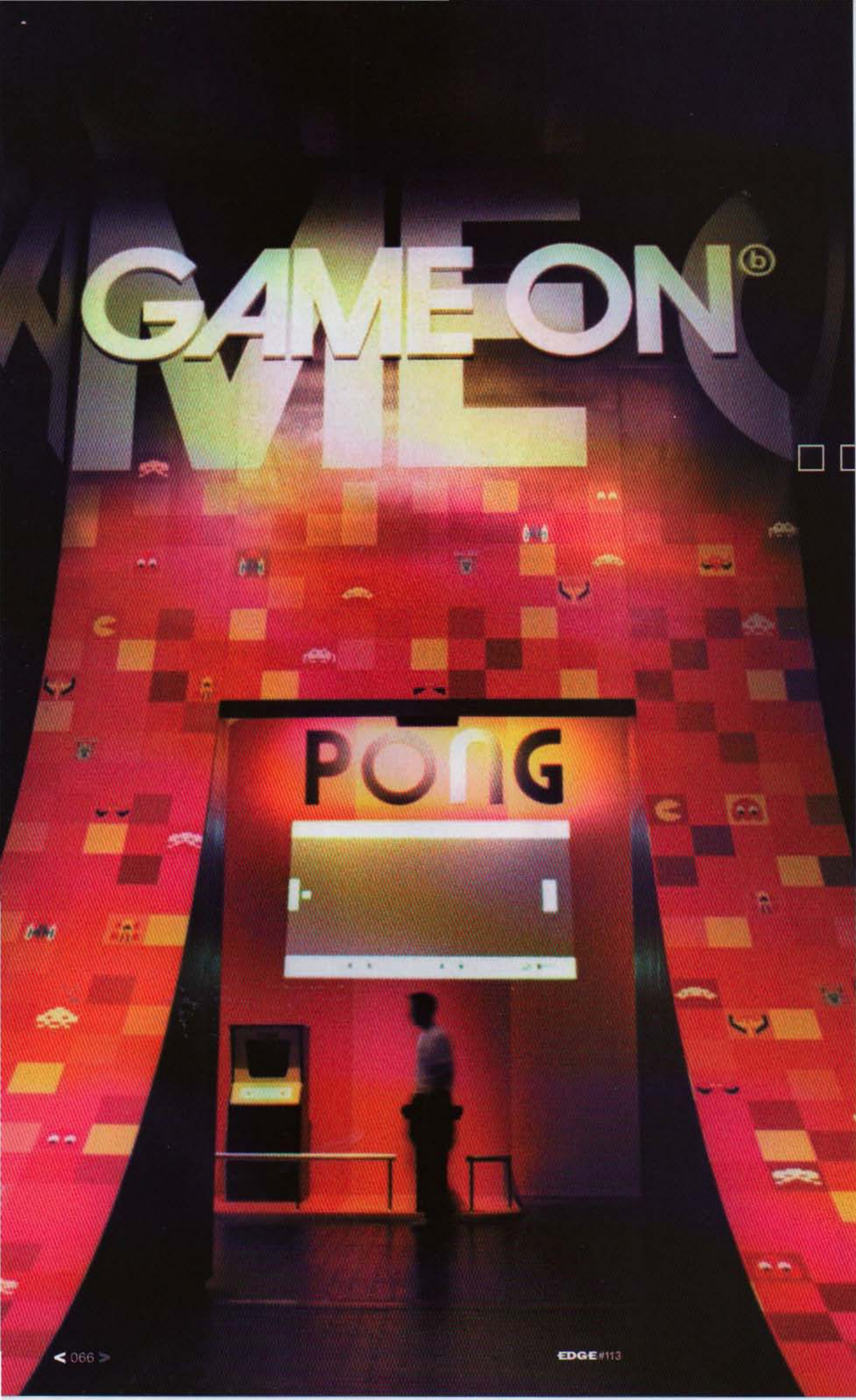
Four years in the making, 'Game On' is a stupendously ambitious project. But does it really do the videogame world justice? **Edge** takes you through some of the show's highlights to find out



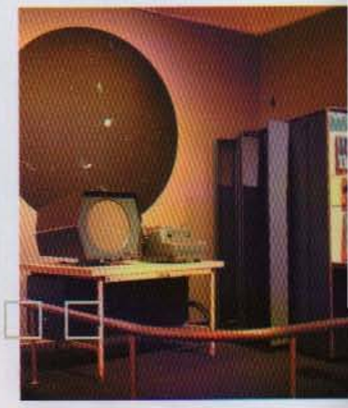
Do you still get that thrill? Those of a certain age will never forget the joy of unpacking their very first videogames console. The Magnavox Odyssey, the Mattel Intellivision, the Atari VCS… so many memories wrapped up in a few pounds of plastic and metal. Getting hold of more recent hardware may be exciting, but has there ever been anything to beat the pleasure of taking home something that smacks of The New? 'Game On' is many things, but above all else it honours a group of people who put the most into an emerging industry: genuine videogame enthusiasts.

It would have been so easy to line up a number of videogame consoles inside glass cases and put exhibit numbers on the pedestals. 'Game On' does attempt to chart the vibrant history of the medium, but there are no stuffy curators


GAME ON
CONTINUES



The $120,000 PDP-1 is a fitting place to start the exhibition. Although the machine hosted *Spacewar!*, attendees will just have to make d with playing the MB Vectrex version nearby. Unlike the game, the PDP-1 has not aged well

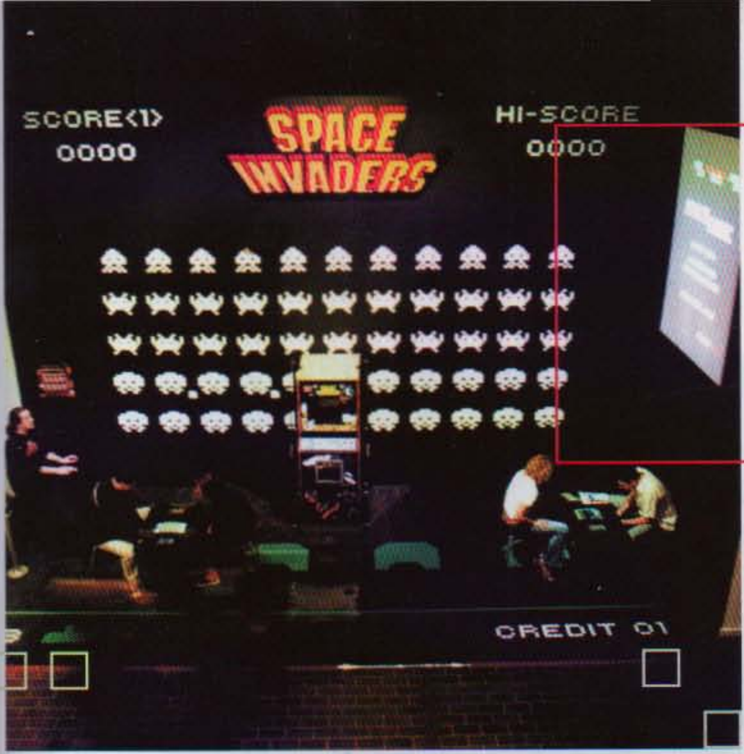


looking over your shoulder and ticking yo off for touching the displays. Videogames were created to entertain, and thankfully that's the overriding tone of the show. Some 130 videogames are there to be experienced. *Street Fighter II* stands shoulder to shoulder with *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*; *Donkey Kong* lives happily in the same room as *Space Invaders*. Many of the games that defined their genres can be played and explored, but there are also one or two surprises fo industry insiders and enthusiasts alike.

Two floors of the Barbican gallery in central London have been set aside for three months to dedicate time and space to the history and culture of the medium. This, for want of a better expression, is **Edge**'s walkthrough of what readers can expect on the showfloor.

The history game

Although you'll initially be greeted by a fully functioning *Dance Dance Revolution* machine in the foyer of the gallery – for the braver members of the public – 'Game On', unsurprisingly, begins with a short history lesson about the origin of th form. Costing $120,000 back in 1962, th PDP-1 is sure to be a draw for videogam historians. Arguably it's the machine that kickstarted the industry and comes complete with the original paper tape code of the first ever videogame, *Spacewar!*. Designed by Steve Russell a



an exercise to demonstrate the PDP-1's capabilities, *Spacewar!* ended up as a game addictive enough to keep the MIT researcher and his team up until 3 o'clock in the morning – on many occasions. The PDP-1 is understandably delicate, so an MB Vectrex version of the game provides an approximation of the experience for interested parties.

All the early arcade greats line the walls of the first room and attendees can examine groundbreaking coin-ops such as *Computer Space* (1971), *Pong* (1972), *Space Invaders* (1978), *Asteroids* (1979) and *Pac-Man* (1980). They are all complete with their cabinets and come dressed in original liveries. Although not all of the earliest arcade games are in playable form (because of the fragile components) *Donkey Kong* (1981) is up and running and is already proving to be one of the exhibition's most popular draws.

There's also a unique opportunity to see and appreciate the consoles that brought videogames into homes around the world. Ralph Baer's Magnavox Odyssey (1972), and all the major machines produced by Atari, Sega, Nintendo and Sony will be available for close examination. If anything, 'Game On' provides a unique chance to sample the delights of acetate overlays from a time when colour graphics were the stuff of fantasy.

Fantastic voyage

Four years in the making, 'Game On' has clearly been a labour of love. One of its most impressive achievements is in securing rare materials from some of the industry's most secretive companies. The magnificent conceptual artwork for Square's *Final Fantasy* series has been created by Yoshitaka Amano and many examples are on display downstairs at the Barbican gallery. Amano-san is one of Japan's most respected artists and his work includes cartoons, graphic novels and even costumes.

Squaresoft designers, animators and coders have drawn inspiration from Amano-san's idiosyncratic style and his work has helped to shape the many *Final Fantasy* gameworlds in the series. 'Game On' also looks into the vital role of the artist and the challenges more powerful technology brings to the role. Original drawings and concept art of well known characters are handsomely displayed.

Although *Pokémon* is the world's most recognised videogame brand, there's still very little known about the company behind the monster. 'GameFreak' began as a cheap fanzine, mostly distributed to friends and relatives by its creator, Satoshi Tajiri. It is now one of Nintendo's most powerful allies. Along with the magisterial artwork of Yoshitaka Amano there's the more vibrant and iconic offerings from Tajiri-san's team

The work of Yoshitaka Amano has been shipped over from Japan for the exhibition. Although it's lovingly displayed, some more cultural and contextual analysis would have been worthwhile



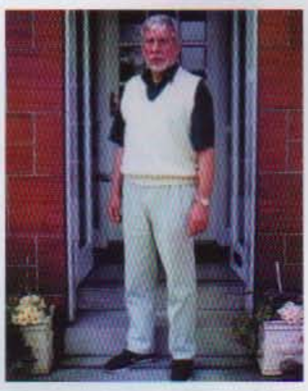
One of the favourite haunts for retro-heads. The Top Ten Consoles area includes classics such as the ZX Spectrum, the SNES and the Atari VCS. All with superbly playable games, naturally



Good will hunting

The photographer James Gooding has become increasingly irritated by the demonisation of videogames by the mainstream press. He believes that many games can be a force of good and has actively sought out people who have benefited from the unique qualities of the videogame medium. A range of thought provoking images can be found at the exhibition and range from portraits of physically disabled gamers through to children with learning difficulties.

Russ Hume (right) is a 74-year-old retired man. There's nothing particularly startling about him apart from his passion for videogames – a hobby that society still tells him is undignified for a person of his age. Hume revels in the intellectual challenges that videogames provide and says they offer him an opportunity to "keep his brain occupied" for long periods of time. James Gooding's work is both moving and poignant and certainly provides a haven for quiet contemplation away from the more clamorous areas of the exhibition.









The exhibition covers two floors and never feels crowded or confined. Facilitators ask that people only play games for five minutes too, so everyone gets a chance to experience their favourite titles



at 'GameFreak'. Rather than simply display a number of images, 'Game On' takes the opportunity to not only showcase rare 'making of' materials but also look into the factors which made the franchise a $8.4 billion success. Nicknamed 'Dr Bug,' Satoshi Tajiri designed the bug-catching game as a reaction against the countryside that he saw changing around him in rural Japan. The story is a fascinating one – and one that **Edge** will be building on for a forthcoming 'The making of...'.

Culture clash

Americans like mindless, brash and derivative games (or anything with NFL in the title). Europeans prefer quirky god-sims featuring characters with green hair.



Perhaps one of the most ambitious parts of the exhibition is the 'Games Culture' area. It's a thematic section that attempts to highlight the cultural values that influence videogames. In truth, trying to classify games according to the values of wider society is fraught with danger.

Although there's some analysis of the close links between games and the military, the return of bedroom coding and the power of the sports franchise, this section is a little on the weak side. Games are broadly separated by region and though most people may decline the invitation to read the wall plaques (apparently only ten per cent of museum visitors bother to do this) there's ample chance to revisit the bloody *Mortal Kombat II* (American) or try out the much gentler *Rayman Revolution* (French). Not that there's any stereotyping going on.

Homemade heroes

One of the most interesting, and unintentionally amusing, parts of the exhibition is the Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie commission. Wandering past this assemblage of mannequins draped with videogame costumes you'd be forgiven for thinking that it's a conscious attempt to accurately recreate Mario, Crash Bandicoot and Star Fox et al. In fact, it's a bizarre experiment asking dressmakers from around the world to recreate videogame character's using text descriptions alone. The result is akin to the infamous 'That's Life!' episode with the inexpertly stuffed cat. Mario's rather forlorn and lifeless facsimile makes for disturbing viewing.

Cinema paradiso

For movie buffs there's also the 'Game On' Screen event. But don't worry, this is not a festival of videogames that have been turned into movies. Bob Hoskins and Kylie Minogue will not be featuring. Instead you can expect classics such as 'The Driver' (1978), 'Tron' (1982), 'The Matrix' (1999), 'eXistenZ' (1999), 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon' (2000) and 'Resident Evil' (2002). It's more a collection of movies that have drawn upon and influenced the gaming aesthetic over the last 25 years. Supported by PlayStation2 there will also be short digital films made by students at the London College of Printing shown before every feature. Some of the best FMV from videogames will also be showing on monitors in the Barbican Screen foyer.

Best of the east

Much better is an upper section of the exhibition focusing on Japanese games culture – if only for the pachinko machines. Find one of the shows 'facilitators' and they'll give you a handful of ball-bearings to try out on the game which has been a Japanese obsession

Play the game

Although 'Game On' doesn't quite recreate the atmosphere of smoke-filled cafes in sleepy seaside towns, it does a fantastic job of delivering some of the most absorbing and enthralling videogames of all time. From Williams' *Defender* (1980) to Midway's *Mortal Kombat II* (1993) there are enough coin-ops and console games to keep hundreds of punters happy through the day. And, yes, they are all free to play. Here is just a sample of some of the games that you can experience at the show.


Donkey Kong (1981)


Tempest 2000 (1993)


Moon Cresta (1980)


Super Mario Kart (1992)


Pac-Man (1980)

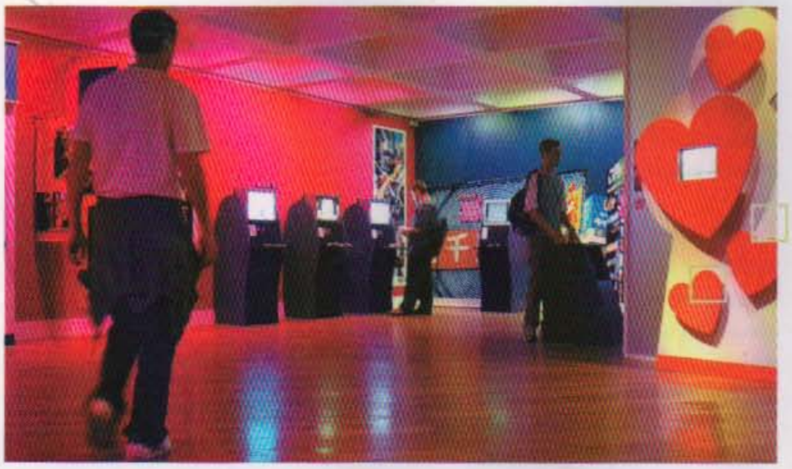

Street Fighter II (1991)


Missile Command (1980)


The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (1998)


R-Type (1987)


Max Payne (2001)



Candyfloss pink and vibrant love hearts – it can only be the section on Japanese game culture. Worth visiting if only for the pachinko machines and a working copy of *Go By Train*

for generations. (Indeed, it might be the only chance you get. Enter a pachinko hall in Japan and it's unlikely you'll be made to feel welcome.)

Displays highlighting the influence of manga and anime are of interest but most visitors will be drawn to the dating games and simulations. Both *Sega Bass Fishing* (Dreamcast) and *Go By Train* (PS2) are available to play. The latter even comes with the control panel peripheral. Although nowhere near as complex as Capcom's *Tekki*, those unashamed by the thought of driving a train in public will find the experience enchanting. And while a whole display is set aside for the brilliant dating sim, *Tokimeki Memorial*, **Edge** readers may be disappointed to read that there's no playable version of the game (though in fairness this is rendered difficult due to the dual barriers of language and general Japanese eccentricity). To compensate, versions of *Dragonball Z* and *SailorMoon* can be played and there's some insight into the processes of localising such products for the tastes of overseas markets.

Soundscapes

Rez, *Frequency*, *Dance Dance Revolution*: three titles that have recently highlighted the importance of game music by using sound as a core component of the gameplay. A brief history of the role music has played in building soundscapes for people underpins this small section of the exhibition.

There are also profiles of some of the major composers of videogame music including Koichi Sugiyama who has worked on the *Dragon Quest* titles with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Many of Richard Jacques' (of *Daytona*, *Jet Set Radio* and *Metropolis Street Racer* fame) tracks can also be sampled. Failing that, you can always tune into Keiichi Sugiyama's 'Buggie Running Beeps' (from *Rez*) for a few blissful minutes.

Multiplayer arenas

Star Wars Galaxies may be the next big thing in terms of the multiplayer experience, but most attendees will have



cut their social gaming teeth on titles such as *Bomberman* and *Street Fighter II*. Sadly, there's no ten-player Saturn *Bomberman* (only possible with the right TV and equipment), though there are enough adaptors and peripherals to keep six players happy until the next in line becomes impatient.

There is also a close examination of the MMRPG phenomenon with forerunners of the medium, *EverQuest* and *Ultima Online* taking precedence. A supporting essay by JC Herz can be found in the 'Game On' book and skilfully examines the origins and future of this growing and important area of gaming. A programme of networked games will be shown during the exhibition's stay at the Barbican and the focus will be on LAN networked titles such as *Quake II*.



Other areas worth a visit:

The making and marketing of games
Character design
Kids games
Vintage magazines
Easter eggs – contemporary commissions

Along with more modern tunes from the likes of The Chemical Brothers, 'Game On' gives younger gamers a unique chance to listen to work from some of the industry's established composers like Tim Follin and Rob Hubbard



Family ties

The Game Families section contains some 35 playable games and is split into three major categories: thought games, action games and simulation games. These follow the classifications laid down in the Le Diberder brothers book, 'L'Univers des Jeux Vidéo'.



The Secret of Monkey Island (1990)

Thought games

A selection of games that seek to stimulate and challenge the more analytical segments of the brain. Many thought games derive their inspiration from traditional board games and include a diverse range of genres including puzzle games (*Mr Driller*), adventure games (*The Secret of Monkey Island*) and RPGs (*Dragon Quest*).



Pitfall (1982)

Action games

Quick reflexes and excellent hand-eye coordination are required to master many of the games in this category. Unsurprisingly these are the games that most attendees have so far flocked to. Genres include reflex games (*PaRappa the Rapper*), racing games (*Indy 500*), football games (*FIFA Soccer*), shoot 'em ups (*R-Type*), fight games (*Virtua Fighter 2*) and platform games (*Pitfall*).



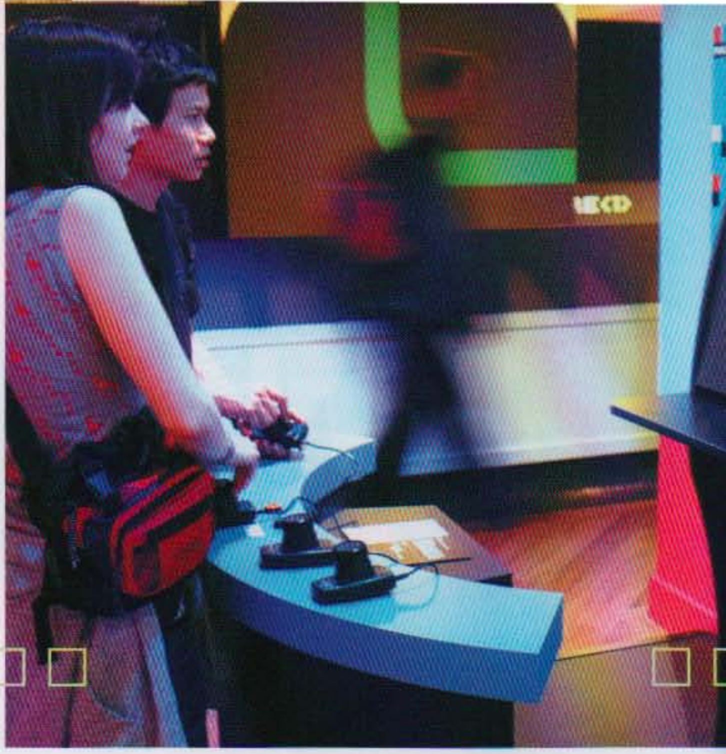
Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (2001)

Simulation games

Perhaps a trickier category to justify – *Ultima*, for instance, makes it into this category rather than into the RPGs genre in the thought games section – but includes games that seek to mimic real-world occupations or scenarios. Genres include military strategy sims (*Metal Gear Solid 2*), sports sims (*Football Manager*) and construction sims (*Sim City*).

The multiplayer area offers classics such as *Bomberman* and Atari's *Warlords*. Getting hold of a paddle almost brings a tear to the eye. What ever happened to paddle controllers?





Future perfect

If videogame visionaries had predicted the future with any degree of accuracy then we'd all be suiting up in lycra minichip leotards and entering home VR booths for sessions of *Tron 3000*. 'Game On' is aware that forecasting the future is a dangerous game. So instead of making bold claims about one single global network or games powered via telekinesis, the exhibition looks at emerging technologies that could indicate the shape of things to come.

Portable communication games from the birth of Tamagotchi through to *Doko Demo Issyo* and *Animal Forest* are investigated. The Japanese love for nurturing and exploring in non-threatening game environments is clearly a genre which is becoming more popular in the west. It's a thoughtful approach looking at how designers are exploring ways in which technology can improve input and interaction. And yes, that includes Sony's Liquid Fire – the motion tracking device that allows players to bat a virtual ball around the screen without the use of a joypad.

There's also a chance to experience past visions of the future including the Vectrex Imager goggles, the Nintendo Powerglove and the prototype of a Virtual Reality headset. How could they have got it so wrong?

End game

'Game On' is a brave attempt to highlight some of the most important areas of videogame history and culture and is the best exhibition of its kind outside of the US. There are some crucial artefacts for enthusiasts to sample. Not since the early '80s has it been easy to find working models of Dave Theurer's gorgeous and elegant *Asteroids* (1980) and *Tempest* (1981) together in the same room. To experience either is worth the asking price alone. Certainly, the opening gallery room of 'Game On' is its strongest area and delivers everything you would expect of such an exhibition.

If there's one disappointing aspect of the exhibition, it's that there's little analysis of some of the more interesting avenues of gaming. Although a museum atmosphere is hardly conducive to such study, an accompanying book delving deeper into the issues touched on might have been worthwhile. Unfortunately 'Game On' – the book supplementing the show – is a little erratic, consisting as it does of an assortment of diverse, sometimes poor, essays.

'Game On' is well worth a visit before its doors close on 15 September. **Edge** readers can still get the 3 tickets for 2 offer by calling the Barbican box office on 020 7638 8891 and quoting **Edge**.



In truth, there are a few sections of the exhibition which feel a little sparse and the show is at its strongest where there's an interactive element. Audio headsets with contextual information would have certainly helped educate and enlighten







A section dedicated to handheld formats is very popular, though many punters probably already have a GBA in their back pockets. There are even a few mobile phone games for the very desperate

Photography: Martin Thompson


www.fordracing.net
Telefonica
MoviStar
MARTINI
Valvoline



Licence to kill

When the movies meet gaming, it's not subjective to say you've seen it all before. But are Hollywood's hand-me-downs gaming's dumb-me-downs, or merely an inevitable step towards the industry's maturity?

With the British summer hanging over your head, you head to Blockbusters for living room thrills. Myriad titles clamour for attention: *Lord of the Rings*, *Minority Report*, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *The Fast and the Furious*, *Spider-Man*, *Bruce Lee*, *Blade II*, *The Matrix*, *Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb* and many more.

Nothing inspires you? Think you should get a game out instead? Think again – those *are* the games. Okay, we're talking summer 2003, but the fact is that the games industry is gorging on big name movie tie-ins, which we'll be playing – or not – for years.

"As development costs rise, publishers need to make more 'safe bets' and one way is to publish branded titles," says **Simon Price**, an analyst at IDG Consulting. "Licensors, in turn, are targeting the game industry to build their brands. So both sides are pushing to increase the number of licensed games."

A quarter of ChartTrack's weekly Top 40 is occupied by licence-backed games as **Edge** goes to press, including *Spider-Man* at number two and *2002 FIFA World Cup* at number three.



Number one is *Medal of Honor: Frontline*. Many, including Price, consider such gaming-derived franchises as licences. Indeed, when game IP is sold, it can be as valuable as Hollywood's creations. Infogrames recently bought the developer Shiny, netting the game rights to 'The Matrix'. Cost: $47m. That compares well with 3D Realms' recent sale of the *Max Payne* rights to Take 2 for around $40m.

"Establishing new brands is expensive in today's market," explains **Barry Jafrato**, VP of Brand Management at Acclaim International. "To do it properly, the publisher needs to spend as much on marketing as development, making it a high-risk proposition. A recognised licence already has a place in the consumer and retailers' mind."

But what is a licence? Here it applies to intellectual property (IP) rights acquired by a publisher or developer to enable the use of another's name, likeness, fantasy world or similar in their game. Licences vary from the obvious (a movie tie-in) to real-world licences (the FIFA or F1 licences) to what amounts to endorsements (Dave Mirra and Tony Hawk).

Instant recognition

The common advantage is recognition. With hundreds of games released each year, publishers must make their titles stand out. "Licences help get bigger reviews and more focus in-store," says **Patrick O'Luanaigh**, creative development manager at SCI – owner o several 'cult' licences including 'The Great Escape', 'Thunderbirds' and 'The Italian Job'. "If we'd done *The Italian Job* without the licence, and called it, say, *Mini Crime*, it would have been much harder to get front covers, investment from our shareholders and strong backing from retail."

Games companies ideally get recognition by establishing a game franchise that – at least to begin with – has proved itself through gameplay. Licences are more controversial because non-game properties are

History: the sequel

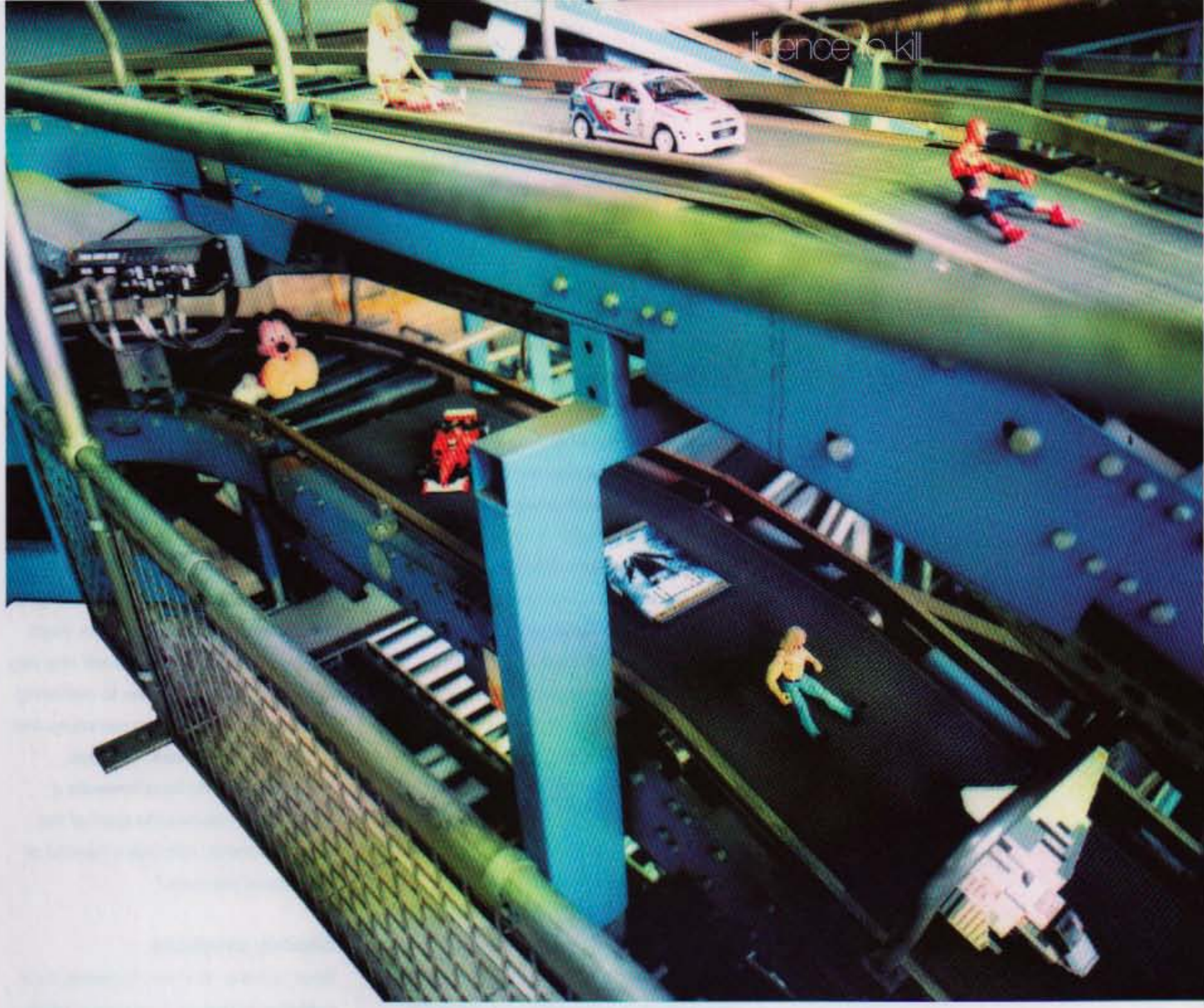
Blame *Pac-Man*. Atari saw the effect a proven name had on sales, and in 1982 tried again with *ET* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Publishers have been at it since.

Virgin joined the big boys in the mid-'90s thanks to a slew of licences as much as its own original games. "We needed to gain market share quickly," recalls former COO **Sean Brennan**. "Licences were expensive but meant we didn't have to spend as much time and money in building up the profile of a property."

Success came with Disney's *The Lion King*, *Aladdin* and *The Jungle Book*, as well several decent LucasArts titles – game quality was mandatory, says Brennan. "We released a game based on the 'Pagemaster' film," he recalls. "Crap film and a crap game, it showed how not to do it."

Another company notorious for licensing was Ocean. Since the mid-'80s it had bought up everything from 'Miami Vice' and 'Terminator' to Roland Rat. "By the time the Amiga had arrived, things had calmed down slightly," recalls **Simon Byron**, editor of Amiga magazine 'The One'. "I think Ocean realised its public perception had waned, and decided to invest in original games rather than spunk money up the wall on identikit licences."

Licences are often blamed for killing the 8bit and 16bit machines, but are more like vultures clawing the last scraps from a dying format. As with PlayStation today, old machines' audiences are vast but apathetic and impossibly diverse, making mass-market or kiddie friendly licences especially attractive.



brought in from movies or TV and made to fit – or not.

Real-world licences, such as FIFA, NFL, Britney Spears or Tony Hawk, have less inherent problems. They are acquired primarily to give a game authenticity or, more cynically, the appearance of it.

"In sports, a licence is all but essential," reckons Price. As well as official branding or a famous face, a sports licence can bring real player names, team colours, previous results, stadiums and so on. Hardcore gamers underestimate the appeal of such real-life data in sports games, which most fans see merely as an extension of an already existing interest.

Despite long making superior playing football games, Konami, for example, has generally been outsold by EA's *FIFA* titles because football fans hate seeing goals scored by Brazil's never-fielded 'Roberto Larcos' and the like. It's revealing that *Pro Evolution Soccer* on PS2 gave EA a stiffer challenge – not only a more 'authentic' game (thanks to Konami's own fresh licensing deal with the player's body FIFpro) but targeting what was not yet quite a massmarket installed base.

"Hardcore gamers underestimate the appeal of real-life data in sports games, which most fans see merely as an extension of an already existing interest"

These licences can also bring hands-on star involvement, boosting credibility and, sometimes, quality. "Colin McRae and co-driver Nicky Grist have been increasingly involved with the *Colin McRae Rally* games," says **Guy Wilday**, head of studio at Codemasters. "We've set Colin up with a test deck at home so he can test drive all the cars as they're constructed." Grist personally writes and records the pace notes.

With trendy stars turning up for photo shoots and coverage in the appropriate press more likely, it may seem that – cost aside – there's no downside to such licences. But all licences have a dark side: the man from the licence holder, he must say "yes."

"For our driving games, we can bring levels of damage which manufacturers wouldn't stand for, and hence *Gran Turismo* couldn't have," points out **Martin Edmondson**, the MD of *Stuntman* developer Reflections.

"Working without a licence gives us ultimate flexibility," he says. "We can do pretty much what we want and change our minds as we please. No waiting for approvals from rights holders."

Nevertheless, for car manufacturers, sports bodies or pop stars, licensing is a fairly painless way of squeezing more from their brands. It's when you bring in another set of creatives – as happens

Territorial games

With global licences in short supply, publishers sometimes front the same game with a patchwork of country-specific licences.

Codemasters markets the *LMA Manager* football sim in France as *Roger Lemerre: La Sélection des Champions*, in Germany as *BDFL Manager*, in Spain as *Manager de Liga* and Italy as *Football Manager Campionato*. The UK's *TOCA* licence is *DTM Race Driver* in Germany, *V8 Supercar Race Driver* in Australia and New Zealand, while the Americans and Spanish start their engines to *Pro Race Driver*.

But that's nothing. Its new football game will come in 15 flavours, with 15 licences covering 15 individually tailored games to tap into the 'tribal fanaticism of club supporters'. We'll get Arsenal, Aston Villa, Chelsea, Leeds United, Liverpool, Manchester United and Rangers, with European teams including Ajax, FC Barcelona and Inter Milan.

No Spurs? No Manchester City? Codemasters must hope some fans aren't so fanatical after all.



Bam! takes the riskier route of backing unproven movie tie-ins such as 'Reign of Fire' and 'Ecks Vs Sever'. The licences are much cheaper but Bam! has yet to score a massive hit using this formula

with TV or movie tie-ins – that the possibility for conflict really grows.

Successfully licensing such material for games is hard. Or rather making the subsequent game is. It must be, for while he agrees that licences are theoretically dandy, Edmondson points out that they have "a very patchy history, littered with some of the most appalling games of all time."

Superman first flew on the Atari 2600. Ever since, it's been a tale of the good, the bad and the ugly. Innovation has been borne out of movie licences – Westwood's *Dune II* invented the PC RTS and Rare's *GoldenEye* reinvented the firstperson shooter. Yet for every compelling effort such as *Star Wars* (Atari, 1983) or *The Hobbit* (Melbourne House, 1983), there's been a *Friday the 13th* (LJN Toys, 1988) or a *Men in Black* (Gremlin, 1998).

"Licensed properties have probably contributed more than any type of game to moving the games industry into the massmarket consciousness," admits **Simon Carter**, co-founder of Big Blue Box and outspoken champion of developer creativity. "The fact that licences often lead to badly designed, second-rate software is a separate issue."

Carter cites several problems. Firstly, what works well in one medium might not work in another. "We're still at a very early stage when it comes to delivering elements like compelling narratives and emotional involvement," he says. "Developers often have to create a game that embodies the spirit of the source material, with only a handful of the original elements."

Shoddy products

What is more, "It is very tempting for a publisher to release a shoddy product, happy in the knowledge that it will sell two million units on the back of the licensed material. Combined with the very rigid deadlines that big film licences can bring, as well as the creative restrictions they may impose, and you can practically encourage the development of bad games."

One company hoping not to is new-ish publisher, Bam! Entertainment. TV and movie-backed games make up nearly all its 40-odd game portfolio. "With popular properties, we hit a larger, more mainstream demographic," says **Alain Tascan**, Bam!'s senior VP of world product development. "That means a better chance of consumer acceptance and a longer product life cycle."

Licences in Bam!'s stable range from Cartoon Network favourites 'Dexter's Laboratory' and 'The Powerpuff Girls' to the upcoming tanks-and-dragons blockbuster 'Reign of Fire'. Typically of Bam!'s movie-backed games, it's based on a not yet released and thus unproven film. Cheaper, but riskier?

"This way we have the jump on early development, as well as PR and marketing," Tascan retorts. "We choose the best script not because of its success potential but because it could be a tremendous game. And we access very talented screenwriters who wouldn't usually collaborate with our industry."

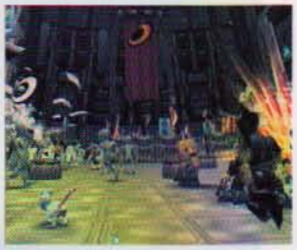
Tascan's hope is that Bam!'s games will blend gameplay smarts with Hollywood's know-how. "Nobody says that Stanley Kubrick wasn't creative, even though he used scripts written by other people," he points out.











Mucky Foot now hopes to build on original titles such as *Urban Chaos* (top) and *Startopia* (above)

SCI's Patrick O'Luanaigh agrees. "Alistair MacLean knew how to write exciting thrillers," he says. "Where are we going to find anyone better to write a story for an action game? Film music is another element – it's great to hear football fans singing the themes to 'The Italian Job' and 'The Great Escape.'"

No limits

A great movie licence on top of an amazing game can certainly be unbeatable. Rebellion's *Aliens Versus Predator* was one such revelation. It recreated the movies' bleak vision, while extending the game genre with differently skilled playable protagonists, including the wall-scaling alien.

"Sometimes limits to creativity make you work harder to be more creative," says **Jason Kingsley**, Rebellion's CEO. "Fox was brilliant to work with, in that it had an understanding of the value of its IP and a belief that everything needed to be within the world.

"On the down side, you do sometimes get into discussions about the fuzzy limits of the genre," he admits. "Xenoborgs were right out there and we had lots of discussions about them. You have to take into account the ideas of other creative producers."

While the blame for many poor movie-based games lies with lazy developers or cheapskate publishers, licence-holder intransigence can wreak havoc. Without an understanding of the protracted nature of game development, or even the different needs of a gamer as opposed to a film-goer, film folk have frequently stalled, contradicted or plain bamboozled their supposed 'partners'.

"Licensors are often more concerned with the way in which their property appears in a game, and less concerned with finishing on time and to budget," says **Vincent Scheurer** of specialist law firm Osborne Clarke. "Accordingly, they usually retain absolute sign-off rights over the finished game."

Successful development with a licence entails keeping the licensor involved. "If a licensor knows from the start not to expect its characters to exhibit full lip synch, then it won't suddenly start demanding it a week before gold master," he says.

Ideally, the developer should have equal respect for the licence. Free Radical Design's co-founder **David Doak** was a key man on the Rare team that created *GoldenEye*.

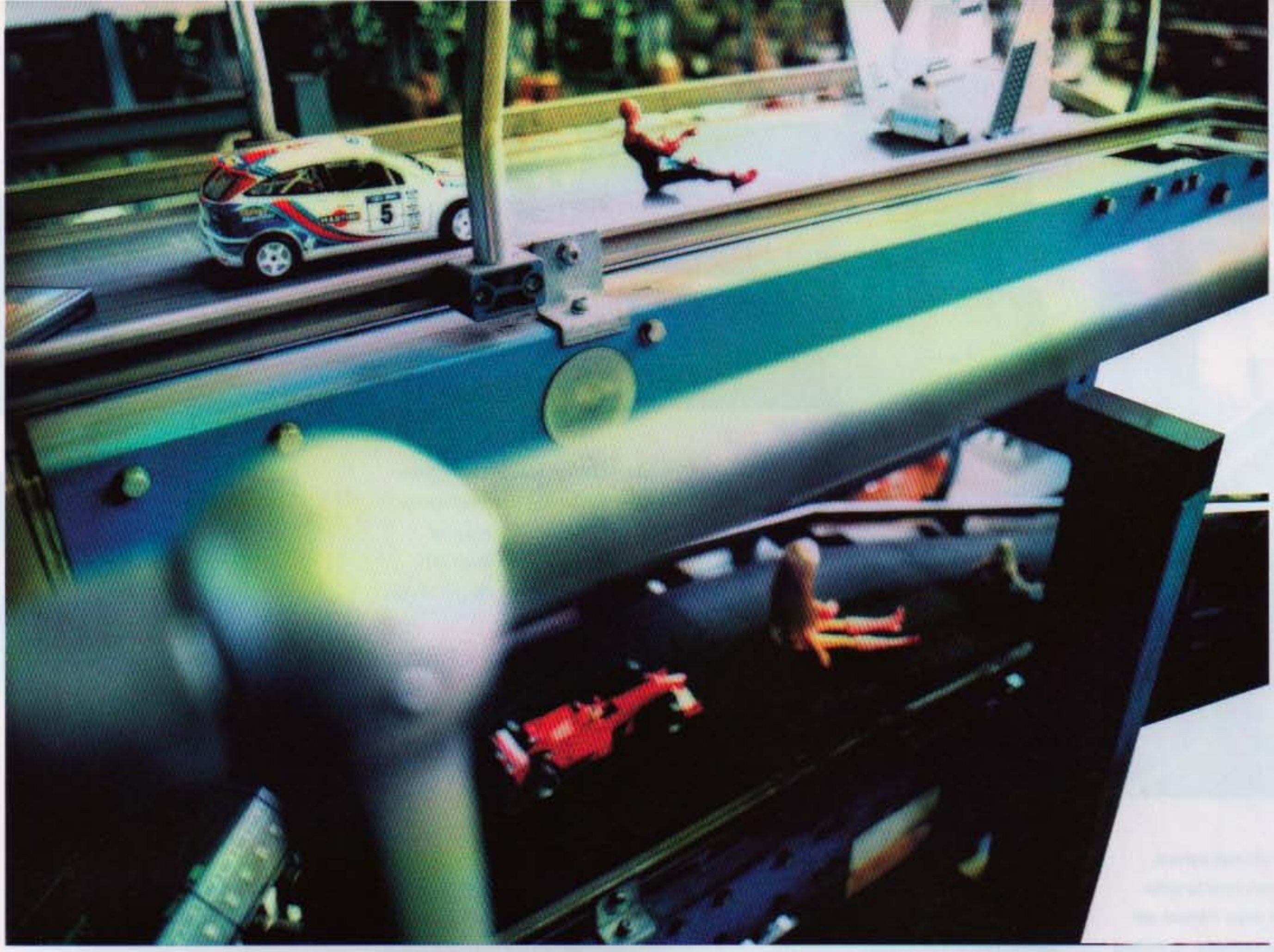
"The development was almost entirely untrammelled by licensor interference," he reveals. "At the time there was little perceived value in a Bond film spin-off game, so we mostly got to do what we wanted."

Crucially though, the developers liked James Bond, and strove toward what team member **Martin Hollis** called a "Bondian ideal." "Ironically, the constraint of adhering relatively closely to the movie storyline meant that we pursued content which would otherwise be seen as overly ambitious," says Doak. Natalya shadows Bond in the movie, and so the team wrote buddy AI for the N64. Plot faithfulness also meant creating very open dam and cradle levels. Free Radical Design's own franchise seems almost reaction against *GoldenEye*'s strictures. "With *TimeSplitters* we deliberately created a very open 'universe' which allowed us to integrate almost whatever we fancied into the IP," Doak says.

"Licensors are often more concerned with the way in which their property appears in a game, and less concerned with finishing on time and to budget"

GoldenEye made it clear that a licensed game could be an amazing one, and helped rehabilitate licences in leading developers' eyes. Today many able studios are happy to work with licences.

Mucky Foot isn't the first developer you'd imagine doing so. But after its first two games disappointed at retail – despite critical plaudits – even this bastion of developer freedom has a licence to thrill.



Photography: **Martin Thompson**

"With the benefit of hindsight we can look back at *Urban Chaos* and think 'Who the hell wants to play the part of a rookie female cop?'" says co-founder **Mike Diskett** candidly. "We were so wrapped up in mixing guns, hand-to-hand combat, platforming and driving, we never even thought about the risk in creating such a minority character."

Mucky Foot is now developing *Blade II* for Activision. "I defy any games player not to want to take on the role of Wesley Snipe's Daywalker," says Diskett who reveals, surprisingly, that he lobbied for the 'Spider-Man' licence while at EA. "The 'Blade II' DVD release will ship many millions of DVDs. Many millions. Who says the games industry is up there with Hollywood?

"When the game hits the shelves, people will know the character and what the game will deliver – a gun, a sword and lust for vampire killing," he continues. "Non-licence games have to work very, very hard to get a fraction of this information across on the box."



Arguably, the freedom to mercilessly depict the trashing of 'nondescript' vehicles has made Reflections' games much better. Although *Stuntman* follows this tradition, Martin Edmondson would never say never to a licensed product

"In times of creative famine, film, television, games and music become more parasitic. But we need to not become too reliant on the creative blood of others"

Martin Edmondson can also imagine a scenario in which Reflections would work with a licence – especially with fewer restrictions on using real cars. "We'd love to, but it will probably take some younger blood moving into decision-making positions within the car industry," he says. "The reigns need to pass to younger execs who developed their passion for cars on *OutRun* or *Daytona*."

Even Big Blue Box's Simon Carter would consider a licence. "Absolutely, unequivocally, totally, yes – depending on the licence," he says archly. "Who wouldn't like to bring the worlds of Philip Pullman or Neil Gaiman to life?"

But Carter also stresses that gaming shouldn't feel like the movie industry's poor relation. "In times of creative famine, film, television, games and music become more parasitic," he says. "This is a survival necessity on occasion, but we need to vary our diets, and not become too reliant on the creative blood of others."

Indeed, it's often forgotten that the games industry sells licences too – Lara Croft to a film studio or *Pokémon* to a lunchbox manufacturer. Doubtless there are purist lunchbox-making craftsmen who bemoan such crass commercialism too.

For those unconvinced that the 'Resident Evil', 'Tomb Raider' or 'Mortal Kombat' films make a great case for this two-way traffic, the bad news is that more look inevitable.

Kirk Ewing is MD of ICMI, the international wing of a Hollywood talent agency. While representing developers at E3 he saw film people everywhere.

"A veritable host of Hollywood movers and losers, everyone from top box office producers to industry hustlers," he says. "Hollywood doesn't lead creatively, it follows trends, and this year everyone is getting hot under the collar about videogames."

Global brands

Why? A familiar story: "Hungry studios are faced with spiralling publicity costs. To cash in on a global brand such as *Grand Theft Auto* is easier than launching a new franchise yourself." And as gaming creates better characters and stories, "Increasingly, games will be optioned by film studios desperate to acquire a pre-packed slice of youth culture."

Jason Kingsley's Rebellion also owns cult comic '2000AD', and while it will make the games, it's working with movie studio Shoreline on two new Dredd films. "We have contracts that give us ultimate creative control, mainly so that we can build up the characters rather than seeing the movie as the ultimate end point," he says. Plus, "I get to tell people I'm a movie producer at parties."

In the race to attract our attention, businesses will keep peddling their wares with familiar faces – at least until we get bored. There's even a licensing conference for game publishers (www.igl2002.com). This article could end listing dozens more high-profile licence-backed games in the pipeline. Yet a long list of games could equally be compiled for the '80s or '90s. And maybe our imaginations are now so saturated that we'd rather play the umpteenth *Star Wars* game, or watch the fifth 'Star Wars' movie, than tackle a new milieu – the licence as comfort blanket.

But as Acclaim's Barry Jafrato warns, no licence guarantees a hit. "Maybe that was the case in the past, but bad games don't sell, whatever is on the pack. Licences are not cheap and licensors are protective – so we now have to deliver experiences that equal the impact of the movies. Licences are a gamble, just like everything else in this business."

Maybe history remembers great licence-backed games as games, but bad ones as bad licences. But Hollywood stars can't save bad games, any more than they can save bad movies.

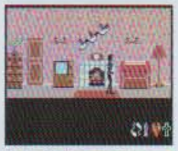


The magnified seven

How seven licences made their little screen debuts...



ET, Atari, 1982
Atari banked on selling several millions of the pre-manufactured *ET* cartridge. Most coding effort went on an ET loading screen – the gameplay involved falling into holes. Famously buried in the desert.



Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Ocean, 1985
The music and controversy has faded, but many a C64 owner is forever warped thanks to the memory of this excellent game – as weird and unique as Frankie's wardrobe. Been there, got the t-shirt.



Terminator 2, Midway, 1992
A stunning, almost olfactory force feedback gun and opponents that appeared digitised from the film (naive days). Shallow gameplay – like many old licence-backed games it suited the arcade.



X-Wing Vs Tie-Fighter, LucasArts, 1997
Besides from-the-film sound and spaceships, the glory of the *X-Wing* series brought teamplay to LAN gaming. One of the best incarnations of a Teflon-licence that too often inspires the dark side.



Army Men (various), 3DO, 1998
3DO built its revival around the appealing *Army Men* franchise, and recapitulated with terrible games. Good plastic soldiers, poor understanding of gaming, or even fun. Trip Hawkins stumbles again.



Tony Hawk Pro Skater, Activision, 1999
Yes, we'd had *Skate or Die* and *720°*, but the Tony Hawk branding inspired Neversoft to float upwards and pull tricks like the four-wheeled thrasher himself. The Extreme Sports genre began here.



Harry Potter (various), Electronic Arts, 2001
So far the games have been merely passable vehicles to sate fans. Still, while EA paid tens of millions in a long-running deal, IDG analyst Simon Price reckons it recouped the lot at Christmas.

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Tempest X3

The *Tempest* arcade machine at 'Game On' gave **Edge** an excuse to revisit technicolor webs. It may just be a version of the classic T2K, but it still thrills.



(PlayStation) Interplay

Pokémon Pinball

While Nintendo's tables are somewhat less intricate than Sega's neatly-composed decomposing efforts, the gotta-catch-'em-all element is utterly captivating.



(Game Boy Color) Nintendo

Deus Ex

The only criticism that might possibly be levelled at an excellent PS2 conversion is that it's too easy. It's still wonderfully absorbing and absolutely engrossing.



(PlayStation2) Eidos

Frequency

'Science Genius Girl' still floats our boat, and the puzzle-game-tied-to-rhythm-action dynamic is still the most addictive that **Edge** has tasted for some time.



(PlayStation2) SCEE

The future of gaming?

It's just not PC...

Edge was excited about *Neverwinter Nights*. BioWare's epic seemed like it was going to be the 'D&D' role-player's dream: completely accurate, uncompromisingly anal, stunningly expansive and infinitely expandable. And that's exactly what it turned out to be, and **Edge** was uniformly overjoyed. Well, it would be, except most of the team haven't had the chance to experience it yet.

Edge's new PC, arriving shop-new this month won't run *Neverwinter Nights*. That's probably not the fault of the code, since the PC won't run other games that worked fine on the last office machine either. No cause. No explanation. This isn't a case of user incompetence, because it's not like there's a lack of experience on the part of the team when it comes to deconstructing and repairing PCs. And even if there was, **Edge** still has its publisher's Computer Services department to fall back on. They're still puzzling, and a diagnosis is eagerly awaited. **Edge** predicts this: "We've worked it out. It's a PC."

Bitchy, perhaps, and at this point, 20 PC fanboys are putting hands to keyboard and emailing something vitriolic, indignant. Shh. It doesn't matter if *your* PC has run without fail for the last two decades, or if *you've* only had to spend loose change on a machine fast enough to run every game ever, or if *you* can't understand why people have problems running PC games. They do, and you are one person. Not everyone has your knowledge or patience. Not everyone's prepared to accept a format where you have to keep your fingers crossed all through the install process.

It's unfair to blame developers, since they're working to snowflake system specs: no two are ever the same. It's difficult to blame anyone, really – it's just the way the home computer has evolved, into an exclusive club for the technically proficient. **Edge** hopes the evolution continues and takes the format somewhere more friendly, because there are genres that thrive on PC, and brilliant games – *Operation Flashpoint*, *Civ III*, the glorious *Neverwinter Nights* – that everyone deserves a chance to play, regardless of luck, budget and arcane knowledge. The good news is that many are going multiformat, and it'll be interesting to see how many PC gamers get tempted out of the upgrade cycle.











Neverwinter Nights

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **BioWare** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

RedEye got it right in **E**112: cooperative multiplay is not just fun, it's one of the most important aspects of videogaming. With that in mind, it's odd to think that it's taken this long for a PC game to implement a flexible mode of this type which is anything more than an afterthought. *Neverwinter Nights* is based faithfully on 'Dungeons & Dragons', that variously mocked, loathed

Taking advantage of the PC's multiplayer and Internet capabilities, Neverwinter Nights is a flagship for the platform









Neverwinter's radial menu (above) is intelligent, so whatever you right-click on produces a specific set of options. It's more convenient than it looks

and loved system of pen and paper role-playing. As such, it presents all the possibilities implied – various multiplayer permutations, adventure design and Dungeon Mastering – combined with a compelling singleplayer experience.

Riding the wave of respectability that has followed the *Baldur's Gate* series, developer BioWare has produced a remarkably confident game which not only flourishes its 'D&D' heritage proudly but also looks to the future with near-limitless possibility for the eager hordes of amateur module-makers. The Aurora Toolset, included in its full splendour, offers all the tools and resources that BioWare used to make the official campaign.

The aforementioned official campaign comprises much of the appeal, however, and it's up to BioWare's usual high standard of design. Beginning with a novice character, you're led just gently enough through the game's excellent interface and controls, while the in-depth rules are exposed without too much of a learning-curve mountain, even for total newcomers. The plot initially draws you in softly, but before too long it begins to twist and turn most impressively – all the more impressive, since you'll be aware that almost everything you see and experience is possible to recreate for yourself.

There are a few jagged edges to *Neverwinter Nights'* otherwise creamy-smooth singleplayer experience, including the reliance at times upon staple RPG set-pieces and quests. Without the possibility to create a party of willing controllable characters, you must rely on the services of one henchman at a time: these are prone to erratic combat behaviour which will be all the more frustrating for those more used to fully obedient characters. Pathfinding is also



Neverwinter Nights makes almost the entire functionality of 'Third Edition D&D' available to players, module developers and DMs, enabling Edge to choose a particularly handy monk character to play

suspect, with the tiniest obstructions momentarily foxing your otherwise all-powerful adventurers. Perseverance is rewarded, though, with atmospheric locations, pleasing character development and a minimum of rule-negotiating. The dynamic of a single heroic character proves rewarding, allowing you to fully exploit and understand the rules to your advantage.

If *Neverwinter Nights* consisted only of the substantial singleplayer campaign, it would be somewhat disappointing. But replaying the story with friends even after completing it alone is more fun than seems likely: far swifter than the pen and paper version of 'D&D', multiplayer *Neverwinter Nights* on a LAN is perhaps the finest PC gaming experience of the year so far. An optional Dungeon Master mode facilitates the playing of less-scripted modules; the DM has the challenge of moderating the experience for the others, offering plot exposition and balancing combat. Dedicated roleplayers will be busy with the powerful Toolset until Christmas and beyond, equipped to create adventures complete with scripted encounters, a wide variety of location and complex dialogue. The proliferation of user-created content – inevitably of mixed quality – is assured, while BioWare is likely to release a mixture of free and commercial content over the coming months.

Taking advantage of the PC's multiplayer and Internet capabilities, *Neverwinter Nights* is a flagship for the platform, although slightly suspect performance and a few minor design issues dampen our enthusiasm fractionally. Nevertheless, it's a worthy successor to the *BG* series and a game no one should be embarrassed to hold in high regard.

Edge rating: **Nine** out of ten

Lost Kingdoms

Previously in E111











The interface might look like a dog's breakfast, but with typical PC efficiency you're treated to more keyboard shortcuts than in an average flight simulator. Those slots are all customisable too



The solo dynamic of the singleplayer game results in a definite 'you versus the world' sensation. Attaining higher levels and the commensurate abilities is therefore satisfying in the extreme

A new dawn

Gamers who simply can't wait to encounter dragons in other people's modules can simply create them for themselves. The Aurora Editor gives you free reign to create anything from one scabby dungeon with a convenient Ancient Dragon to ambitious scripted projects recreating favourite 'D&D' campaigns from an ill-spent youth. Time spent investigating the editor will be rewarded in the surprising subtlety it's possible to achieve. Complex object-oriented quests can be designed with ease thanks to a sensible Windows-style interface, helpful wizards and tool-tips.



Lost Kingdoms

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **From Software** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**





The card at the bottom left of the screen comes into your 'hand' once another card has been expended

The release of *Lost Kingdoms* in the west never looked entirely assured. The mixture of RPG hokum and card-battling may be a hugely popular sub-genre in the east (we must remember that *Yugioh! Dual Monsters* is arguably even more important in the playgrounds of Tokyo than *Pokémon*) but publishers have largely declined the invitation to release such games in America and Europe. It is fortunate, then, that Activision picked up this unassuming gem.

The plot is typically elaborate Japanese RPG fare and while some subtlety may have been lost in translation it will win no awards for coherence or delicacy. Suffice to say, an evil must be thwarted, kingdoms must be united and a terrible fog lifted from the good land of Argwyll. You get the picture. But the narrative is there merely to add impetus to the game's core delights of card collection and deck management. While never threatening to deliver the depth and nuance of *Magic: The Gathering*, *Lost Kingdoms* has the charm and intricacy to win over beginner and enthusiast alike.

Starting out with just three magical cards the player takes heroine, Katia, through a series of mission-based adventures. New cards can be collected from chests, taken from benevolent characters, bought in the apothecary (see Little shop of horrors) or gained by trapping weakened creatures with the 'capture' command. As is traditional in such games, each creature broadly conforms to an elemental type: wood, earth, water or fire. Employing a water-based card against a fire-based creature, for instance, will pay greater dividends.

Lost Kingdoms has the freshness, charm and vitality to overcome its imperfections and make it a vital purchase for GameCube owners



When a random encounter is triggered you become confined to a small area. You can fight the creatu the death, capture them, or run to the edge and escape. However, you will lose a card for your cowa



Certain objects can be interacted with to open doors etc. Health-points provide sustenance for the road ahead

Cards range from single-burst specials, such as Jack-O-Lantern, a creature that will pluck its explosive head off, throw it into the fray and damage any enemy within the vicinity, to the Sand Golem, a gargantuan ally that can be summoned as a decoy to draw enemies away from your position. Only one deck of 30 cards can be taken on a mission and once a card has been used in battle it is lost for the rest of the level. This ensures that shrewd strategising and deck management is necessary for success. Still, there are several ways to replenish the deck during missions. Cards discovered during the quest can be added to your supply at key health-points, while special cards, such as the Mind Flayer, will randomly recall several cards to your deck and there's always the capture command, a brilliant tactic to use when one of your creatures is about to expire in battle.

Lost Kingdoms really comes alive, however, when decks can be created from the many creatures you've encountered on the journey. Finding the right combination of healing, attack, summoning and replenishment cards for one deck can be agonising and missions are often won in the deck-editing screen before the level has even begun. Although there are some 105 cards to collect, some of the more powerful ones are located in secret areas which can be opened up by smashing through game furniture using your creatures' abilities.

There are a couple of weaknesses that otherwise dilute the heady mix of card strategy and flamboyant set-pieces. Katia's movement is a little on the slow side and because cards take time to be thrown into the battle, some distance must be maintained between enemy and heroine.

Unfortunately, this sometimes produces a situation somewhat like a fantastical Benny Hill sketch with several creatures following Katia unerringly around the screen for long periods. Some may also argue that the effect produced when a random encounter occurs is unnecessary. Yet *Lost Kingdoms* has the freshness, charm and vitality to overcome such imperfections and make it a vital purchase for GameCube owners.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of te











Many of the levels contain secret areas that can only be explored after obstructions have been destroyed. This not only extends the lifespan of the game but offers a good way to find rare cards



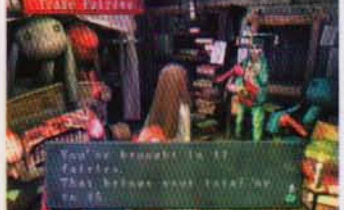




Cards are called into your 'hand' randomly, but this means you may have to use a powerful card on an easy enemy. The alternative is to 'discard' it, and it will return to the deck once the battle is over

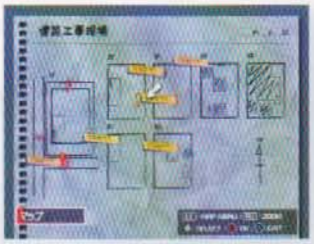
Little shop of horrors

Eventually Katia is able to get advice from two strange characters: Alexander and Gurd. Alexander's bold claim is that he's researching fairies, and any found during the adventure can be traded in for powerful cards. Gurd owns an apothecary where Katia can buy, sell and transform cards discovered during the missions. Experience points gleaned from winning battles can be used to transform a weak card into a much more potent creature. A Dragonoid, for instance, can eventually evolve into a Black Dragon – a fearsome creature almost immune to any special damage attack.



Zettai Zetsumei Toshi

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Irem** Developer: **InterOne Inc** Price: **¥6,800 (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**







Zettai Zetsumei Toshi**'s reimagining of the *Biohazard* inventory system involves a succession of Tardis-like rucksacks**

If you insist on reducing *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* to its basic gameplay components, 'survival horror' is as good a tag as any. The overriding atmosphere of anxiety; the long passages of cautious exploration punctuated by set-piece shocks; the emphasis on inventory management; the limp-to-the-next-savepoint logic – all are present and correct. What's missing, however, is the gothic kitsch and undead action that dominates the genre – and the action is all the more starkly spooky for it.

Zettai is videogame as disaster movie. It's June 2005 and on an imaginary man-made island – the titular City of Desperation – which is undergoing the severe aftershocks of a horrendous earthquake. You're one of the few lost souls still trapped among the ruins, and have to navigate the island's radically reconfigured geography and help others escape along the way.

It may sound like sci-fi, but it doesn't feel that way: in light of the failings of the emergency services following the 1995 Kobe earthquake, and given current anxieties about the structural stability of Japan's synthetically extended coastlines, *Zettai*'s fictions owe much of their impact to real-life fears. Thankfully, the earthquake proves an inspired feature regardless. In *Biohazard*, the fear is that a green monster in a gimp suit might leap out from around the nearest corner; in *Zettai*, it's that the very ground beneath your feet might disappear with your next step.

Zettai is packed with gems and refreshed by its new angles on well-worn ideas. It's gratifyingly intuitive and unnervingly odd all at once



Zettai**'s textures are basic and its sound effects often rudimentary, but they are enhanced by superbly-realised dust clouds and showers of rubble, which combine to exceptional effect, particularly in set-piece**

The tremors that strike on as the story unfolds are one of its defining triumphs: walkways, roads, bridges and tower blocks all give way without warning. Once a section has been completed and successfully escaped, it will more often than not collapse just as our heroes are out of range, leaving cascades of dust, wire and cement and an always-tangible air of urgency, but also serving to steer the player to the next goal.

This hand-holding approach may grate with those who prefer their exploration a little more open-ended, but it's balanced by the related lack of backtracking and aimless ambling in the game. (After all, you can hardly go back to where you've just been when it's not actually there anymore.)

The carnage catches the eye first, but *Zettai* is no one-trick pony. Thanks to the deployment of an *Extermination*-style 3D engine, there is more scope for variety than in many of its more illustrious survival horror peers. For every lock-and-key item puzzle, there's a section of untaxing, *Ico*-style platforming. There's also a hint of *Ico* in the way you must shepherd ineffectual NPCs to safety, and a shoulder-button shout that recalls Ico's plaintive 'Yorda!'

There's also a strong whiff of *Shenmue* about the game's optional but intricate avenues for collecting useless objects (not to mention its ability to wring beauty from rundown, concrete-grey locales). Equally, the thought that has gone into the eccentric range of tools that do prove useful is charmingly evident throughout. Only the hardest-hearted PS2 owner could fail to finc something to delight him here.

Despite its sporadic scrappiness, understandable slowdown issues, the occasional sense that the gamer is only alor for the ride and a nagging suspicion that the game's later plot twists rob the experience c some of its lonely, desolate impact, *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* is packed with little gems and refreshed by its new angles on well-worn ideas. It's gratifyingly intuitive and unnervingly odd all at once. If, as seems possible, it never sees a western release, it will be a minor disaster.

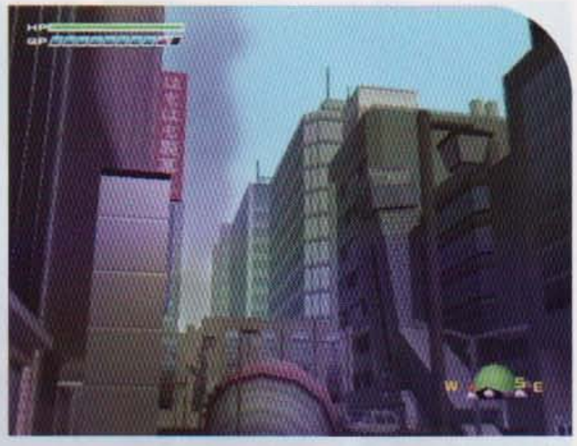
Edge rating: Seven out of te

Otostaz

Previously in **E**109

















The health bar is augmented by a water meter which must be replenished at taps (which double as save points) in order to keep fit. Water evaporates rapidly when running or in a fall, enforcing a tip-toe pace



Multiple endings afford an opportunity to go back and correct oversights, selfish behaviour, or stupid jumps. Above, your irritable female companion glares on: she's clearly not amused by your athletic ability

Richter scale madness

The Trance Vibrator pack released alongside *Rez* in Japan last year is compatible with *Zettai*. Anyone troubled by **E**112's report on the potential hazards of vibrating peripherals might want to give it a wide berth, though. There's no doubt that the seismic shudders that send it bouncing across the sofa intensify the experience, but at what price? After an extended session on this game with the DualShock2 alone, chances are that the average elbow will be begging for mercy.



Otostaz

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£37)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Previously in **E110**









The blue pylon-like construction is a level six spire, the most difficult building to construct. The silhouettes show the biggest house in each row



Housing benefit

On completing one of the goal-based Journey mode levels, the player gets a few seconds to build a city on an empty playfield. When the time limit ends, a falling wall crushes all the buildings except those on the diagonal, and those structures still standing add to the level bonus. It's an excellent way of rewarding those who finish the levels early.



Dropping water on a square will simply replace whatever's already there, but dropping land or trees on a block that's already occupied will cause an explosion, levelling out the four immediately connecting squares

The simplest things are often the most beautiful. *Tetris* can be described in a sentence, *Super Monkey Ball* in a handful of words. *Otostaz*, the latest product of Sony's 'simple games equal shorter development' policy, takes longer. Like this…

In Journey mode, the grid-based playfield scrolls from right to left, and the player places different tiles – trees, water and land – upon it. A correct arrangement of tiles causes houses to spring up from nowhere, and the objective is to provide each column of the grid with at least one kind of house before it drops off the end of the level. A level one house grows if trees and water surround a land square. A level two house grows if two level one houses surround a land square. A level three house grows if two level two houses surround a land square, and so on up to level six. Derelict houses, black shadows awkwardly placed on the board by the game, can be renovated by building a house of equivalent level somewhere on the board. Failure to fix one before it slips off the side of the level causes a spiky black hand to tear a strip from the playfield.

The previous paragraph's size is commensurate with *Otostaz*'s immediacy. It is not a simple thing to learn – it requires patience on the part of the player, the will to learn patterns of prosperous housing – but at least it's impeccably instructed. A lengthy tutorial details the basics, and bookish players can follow up their studies in Puzzle mode. Here, where the rules are identical but for the absence of scrolling, the idea is to build several houses of a certain level within a limited number of moves. It teaches strategy outside the confines of panic.

Which is neat, because the eventual point is to suppress that natural destructive panic, plan from memory, execute and enjoy. As such it's played less on instinct and more on grand design. One well-placed tile can cause ripples of chain-reactions across the board, and growing bigger buildings means gaining bigger scores. That's the idea, and there's nothing really wrong with it, as long as the formula fits inside your head.

Otostaz is closest in mechanic to *One Piece Mansion*, and while it's a little too frustrating and not quite addictive enough, it's exquisitely presented, gorgeously orchestrated and perfectly executed. Conceptually, though, *Otostaz* is a little too unwieldy for its own good.

Edge rating: **Six** out of **te**

Prisoner of War

Format: **PlayStation2 (reviewed), PC, Xbox** Publisher: **Codemasters** Developer: **Wide Games** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now (PS2, Xbox), September (PC)** Previously in **E**96, **E**106

Ever get that 'Groundhog Day' feeling? Play *Prisoner of War* and you'll be driven to relive the same excruciating pattern of existence over and over again until a trigger is found to free you from the pain. Of course, routine is expected in a prison camp, but it's the bad design that really grates. Often you will be acutely aware of what is required to complete a mission and propel the plot forward, but shoddy controls and an inept camera will conspire against even the most determined escapee.

Any title that dismisses easy action and tried-and-tested arcade thrills in favour of a more sedate and cerebral challenge should be commended. But the exploration and stealth aspects are undermined by clumsy execution. It's extremely frustrating when, after spending ten minutes sneaking past guards, climbing fences, crawling under vehicles and donning disguises, you are thwarted at the last moment by the character's inability to enter an open doorway. You are then forced to perform the whole sequence again – only to be discovered on the next attempt when the character fails to dismount from a wall because of sticky controls.

Inspired by every POW film from 'The Great Escape' to 'Stalag 17', *Prisoner of War* does an excellent job of recreating the mood and atmosphere of prison life. Obviously, key rules must be observed. The player must stay within designated boundaries, turn up promptly for roll calls, and generally keep out of trouble. But while others are going about their daily routine it is possible to sneak off and generally cause the Germans a degree of consternation. However, missions are doled out in an overly prescribed fashion and once the solution is discovered (usually from buying hints from other inmates) the frustration of actually completing it begins.

The game's technical problems are more regrettable because of the many clever ideas evident throughout. Apply boot polish to the face and guards are less likely to see you during a night sortie, spotlights can be broken by using a catapult and certain guards can even be bribed to provide alternative means of completing missions. But ultimately, the annoying controls will make all but the most patient gamer go a little stir crazy.

Edge rating: **Four** out of **ten**













Speak to the head of the prison escape committee and you'll be able to get a 'recce' of the mission objective. Looking through keyholes and hiding in cupboards are nice ideas – shame about the controls



POW **adds to the already burgeoning body of games with risible voice acting. Although intentionally OTT, the ''Allo, 'Allo!'-style accents occasionally drift over into the slightly offensive. Advice can be obtained by chatting to inmates**



Tin can alley

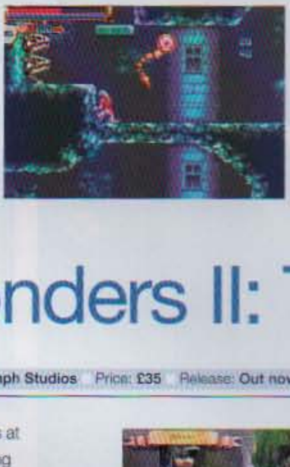
During the recreation period money can be earned by indulging in a spot of gambling. By far the most engaging of these games consists of knocking down a series of cans with a limited supply of stones. Winnings can then be used for bribery or to buy information from the other inmates. Stones can also be used in the main game to throw at barrels and distract guards.

Castlevania: White Night Concerto

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥4,800 (£26)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**









One of the major improvements of this new *Castlevania* adventure is the addition of a dash command (by pressing the L or R buttons). This enables the player to avoid attacks swiftly and also helps relieve the tedium of backtracking around the castle

Castlevania: Symphony of the Night remains one of the most cherished games on the PlayStation. Thankfully, Konami has not strayed too far from the excellent formula for GBA, and the enjoyable first GBA iteration, *Circle of the Moon*, has been improved upon with a brighter, more fluid and graphically resplendent update in *White Night Concerto*. Although the game is more of a touch-up than an overhaul, it retains all the elements that have made the series so popular.

Changes include a new Relic and Spell Book system to replace the card power-ups. As is traditional, negotiation around the castle is blocked by barriers that can only be surmounted by finding key items. These include relics such as the Sliph Feather (to double jump) and the Gecko Tail (to slide under narrow ledges). Spell casting is also implemented well and once a couple of spell books are discovered they can be used with the secondary weapon to produce some startling effects.

Fearsome bosses, equipment shops, whip upgrades and an assortment of secrets to discover complement the excellent platform action. What *White Night Concerto* lacks in originality, it makes up for with polish and attention to detail.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Age of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Take 2** Developer: **Triumph Studios** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

That we have moved on from flat graphics is at least as much a matter of fashion as gaming possibilities. Yet within videogaming's evolutionary strand there remain undiscovered potentialities which is why we should really pay attention to the cultural cul-de-sac of turn-based strategy. While it took *Advance Wars* perfect tactical haiku to polish it up for the console gamers, in games such as *Civilization* and *Heroes of Might and Magic* it lives perennial on the PC.

Age of Wonders II is an effective riff off *HoMM*'s exploration, conquer and adventure precept, surpassing it in almost every aspect. Where *AoWII* operates best is in the dichotomy between the wizard – your avatar in the gameworld – and the more general heroes. The heroes explore, while you sit in a tower, controlling and observing. It's a neat parallel, the character adopting the same role as the player.

Other than an intense multiplayer mode, which plays with pace and showcases the game's flexible diplomatic system to best effect, there's little else that revolutionises the genre. But as an exercise in honing, with the gradual polishing of the eastern beat 'em up as the best comparison, it's admirable.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









Akin to *Heroes of Might and Magic*, encounters strewn across the map can radically alter the flow of play. Explore dangerous ruins or chart portals to gain an important strategic advantage, risking troops being lost against the possible magical treasure

GT Concept 2002 Tokyo–Geneva

Format: **PS2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Polyphony Digital** Price: **£25** Release: **July 19**

The console equivalent of an expansion pack, *Concept* is likely to only lubricate the dipsticks of those players who also share an enthusiasm for cars. The slim selection of five familiar (reversible) tracks is irrelevant – they are merely conduits for accessing the latest virtual showroom created by Polyphony's diligent artists. And the hook is that, as the title suggests, the only way you'll ever get to experience many of these vehicles is through a DualShock2 (or GT Force wheel) regardless of how much money you may have.

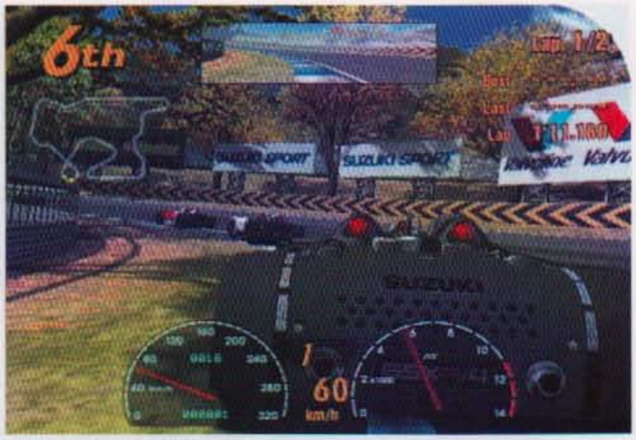
The structure follows that of *GT3*'s Arcade mode closely, with success in licences and races increasing the choice of transport. New is the option of a pace car which is a great way of learning circuit technique but it does make licences even more disappointingly easy for anyone but the most elementary player. It's perfectly possible to clear them all inside of one hour.

The races do at least provide a longer challenge – the masterful, elegant handling dynamic and imposing audio/visual quality return – but you do wonder, even with the reduced tariff and the thrown in surprises, whether for this price the concept shouldn't really still be offering a little more novel content.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









Around 100 models feature and while focused on the exotic conceptual motor show offerings such as the Toyota RSC rally car (shown left behind pace car) and Suzuki's GSX-R/4 (main), new real-world models have also made the cut (Focus RS, Civic Type-R, etc). The charming Pod race complete with wacky circuit (top left), one of four extra bonus modes that provide the right impetus to drive you through the game

GT Advance 2: Rally Racing

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **MTO Inc** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**





Jumps feature prominently and they do add something to the fun quotient but there isn't enough novelty here to warrant rushing to your local videogame supplier. Should one of your friends also be persuaded by the game's immediacy, though, the competitive twoplayer link-up option can improve things





Sequel to an early (and rather enjoyable) GBA racing effort, *GT Advance 2* focuses solely on the world of rallying. Gone is the rewarding upgrading aspect of the original to be replaced with a familiar structure requiring you to powerslide through a 14-round global championship in one of 15 licensed cars.

The game's 42 stages throw up the predictable variety of road surfaces and weather alterations and the functional visuals certainly promote a very healthy sense of pace. As with its predecessor, the handling feels hideous at first, particularly as this time most of the navigation is executed sideways. But a little acclimatisation subsequently reveals the surprisingly agreeable quality of its character.

GT Advance 2 may lack the technical aptitude of last month's *V-Rally 3* but it is more immediate and, crucially, can provide better enjoyment at times. Having said that, it doesn't really offer anything that hasn't been experienced before while also managing to lose the tuning element that proved fundamental in establishing the compelling nature of the original *GT Advance*. And in this case less is certainly not more.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Barbarian

Format: **PS2 (reviewed), Xbox, GC** Publisher: **Titus** Developer: **Saffire** Price: **£40** Release: **September** Previously in **E108, E10**







The multiplayer mode (main) offers support for up to four combatants, and up to four extra CPU grunts can be thrown into the mix. The resulting action can prove messy. As in *Power Stone*, players can grab parts of the scenery and use them as cudgels (right). Magical attacks (far right) are easily pulled off, and accompanied by a predictable range of graphical effects



If, for some perverse reason, you wanted to show a friend what videogames used to be all about, show them this. It's all there: fizzing magical spells, axe blad the size of dustbin lids, and cardboard cut-out heroes and heroines set against a story ripped straight out of below-par 1980s 'D&D' module.

Behind this clichéd frippery sits a solid fusion of *Power Stone* and *Soul Calibur*. Capcom's influence sees players able to pick up and throw opponents, rocks and even stone pillars, while Namco devotees v feel immediately at home with the game's edged weapons and tap-tap combos. However, developer Saffire hasn't stopped there – in fact you can almost imagine its designers throwing extra elements into the mix not for the sake of balance or gameplay value but simply because they could. So you also get magical projectiles, the ability to monkey swing and bonus points that can be spent to upgrade fighters.

Barbarian's polish is without question – the fighters and many of the multi-layered environments look just great – but as a game it's a lot less sophisticated than it thinks it is. It's hollow, simple fun. Just how videogames used to be.

Edge rating: Six out of te

Hunter: The Reckoning

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Interplay** Developer: **High Voltage** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

When the predominant colour is brown, you know what to expect – a grim action adventure. *Hunter* is very brown. You could moot it as a 3D iteration of the crowd-control mayhem of *Gauntlet*, overlaid with the schlock-fuelled horror of *Biohazard*. There's no synergy here, however, between these or any other high-concept pitches, only clash. To its credit, and from a creative perspective, it doesn't wallow lazily in its own gore, but makes decent use of aural and visual detail to create an atmosphere of dread.

Any success unnerving the player, however, is removed by, ironically, fraying their nerves with muddled combat. Attacks are distributed by making good use of both analogue sticks in a move-and-shoot style meaning that *Hunter* is often a pleasurable firing range of unrelenting gunplay when engaging the enemy from a distance. But try using a bladed mêlée weapon to fight up close, or sigh your way through the dull boss battles and it becomes frustrating. Multiplayer mode is overpopulated to the point of redundancy – it turns the battlefield into a fiasco of bodies and vanishing energy bars. When the design is this inconsistent, there's such a thing as *too* much action.

Edge rating: Four out of ten









While the visuals are detailed, they will often go unappreciated in the singleplaye campaign as the game is far more digesti when played with the camera zoomed completely out. Multiplayer, however, is consistently frustrating regardless of how the proceedings are viewed

Pinball of the Dead

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Wow Entertainment** Price: **$30 (£20)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**

So Sega's light-gun villains skip to another format, and into another genre. Three themed tables make up the playfields of *Pinball of the Dead*: stone and mysticism in the tightly packed Wondering, rail-based science frolics in Movement, and shlock horror in Cemetery. The objective is to score highly by learning the angles and rules of each; beyond that, sequences of shots lead to special bosses. All expected.

But not all good. Pinball purists won't enjoy the conga lines of zombies roaming the tables, while those who prefer gentle action akin to *Pokémon Pinball* will dislike *PotD*'s harsh gravity and unforgiving alleys. There's also the fractured nature of each table, which resembles the early Game Boy title *Revenge of the Gator*, split into vertically aligned sets of flippers. While it provides a comfort zone when you're in the top section, there's little opportunity to play graceful arcing shots or watch the ball career directly up the whole table.

But the intricacy has its charm: there's much to do, always a driving force above standard score attack. It's also beautiful and, despite the curious blend of realism and fantasy, competent. Which begs the question: where can the zombies go from here?

Edge rating: Six out of ten









Each table gives bonuses for specific sequences of shots, detailed in the extensive tutorials. The aim is to sequentially defeat each of the six boss creatures, tiny gruesome sprites that wander round their own empty tables and beg for steel-ball destruction

Tour de France

Format: **PS2 (reviewed), Xbox** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in E109



Tour de France looks good enough, particularly the riders themselves. But the number of competitors onscreen at once is limited by the polygon count, a case of graphical ambition impinging on enjoyment







The premise feels like an exercise in game design; take an untested concept in modern gaming, and try and turn it into an experience so solid it feels like cycling racers have always been around. Within those parameters it's a success. The strategic, paced *Track 'n' Field* button-pressing simulating the pedalling never feels unnatural, and the structure contains everything you'd expect in a vanilla racing game; Quick Start, Arcade mode, Career mode, twoplayer versus. All fine in theory, then, and so it comes down to the execution.

Steering is twitchy and crashes are 8bit in subtlety, nearly always favouring opponents. There are only two riders in races in twoplayer mode, which makes the option so crude it's near-redundant, and the number of bikes onscreen in singleplayer is also limited. Then there's the brevity of the Tour itself, which will disappoint those trying to live the yellow jersey dream. Gliding down a hill and braking just enough on the bend, timing bursts from the fluorescent slipstream, finishing a race exhausted and a fraction of a second in front: all these things work. But there are just too many things in *Tour de France*'s paper-thin dynamic that don't, and that's why it can't be recommended.

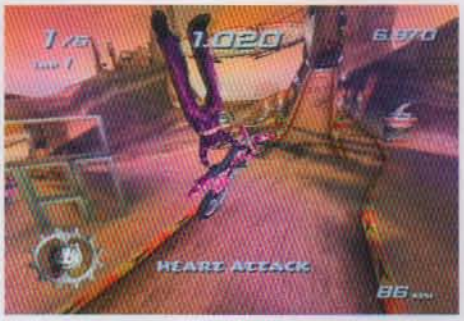
Edge rating: Four out of ten

Freekstyle

Format: **PS2 (reviewed), GC** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **August 2 (PS2), September 6 (GC)**









There's no faulting the adrenaline-fuelled thrills of *Freekstyle*, but problems of structure and presentation result in a product that falls short of its illustrious snowboarding predecessor, *SSX*. Still, in spite of frustrations it can be immensely enjoyable – despite a handling model that seems to glue your wheels to the track

There's a certain sense of familiarity here; after *SSX* on snowmobiles comes *SSX* on motorbikes but, despite the sense of déjà vu, *Freekstyle* falls considerably short of the standards set by its arctic archetype. It does have moments of sheer and utter abandon, and an unfettered sense of speed and energ gives way to a visceral sense of enjoyment – in spite of twitchy digital handling, irritating US teen rock, and rudimentary AI. Chaining sequences of stunts to fill up boost meter and pulling off spectacular manoeuvres to go into a hi-octane Freekstyle mode can be superb fur

But there's also a certain amount of style over substance here, and for every spontaneous thrill there's a correspondingly exasperating frustration. *Freekstyle's* structure is slavishly borrowed from *SSX*, with the majority of tracks and riders initially locked, but while *SSX* offset any consequent irritation through sublime track design and intuitive handling, *Freekstyle's* forced repetition exposes the weaknesses of its level design and basic handling model – successive races over the same course rapidly become chore-like. Still, when the inevitable 'unlock all' codes are available, the game's immediate thrills will no doubt prosper.

Edge rating: Six out of te

King of Fighters EX

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Big Ben Interactive** Developer: **Sammy** Price: **£30** Release: **August**

Previously in E106

You're reviewing *King of Fighters*, and, after skipping through it on Very Hard for the nth time – and admiring the gorgeous job the developer has done with the graphics and sound, and wondering how it's made the AI *this* lobotomised, the question appears after every word you type. How do you score this?

Because in so many respects the conversion is a triumph, miniaturising the Neo Geo mascots without losing any of their grandeur or reactive feel. And there are people who'll get something from it – those who've been scared from the series by its 'difficult' hardcore-favourite stance, for whom this acts as the perfect introduction to one of the purest fighting dynamics. It's like playing someone really stupid, but not feeling guilty about beating them over and over again because they never sulk, and never get tired. But eventually you *will*, and that's when you have to move on.

So, the answer to the question? Simple. You score the game commensurate with the entertainment it provides, and *King of Fighters EX* is a disappointment. It gives a slightly greater challenge than *Guilty Gear X*, provides a few more options and is just prettier, gaining a fractionally higher score. Four, then.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

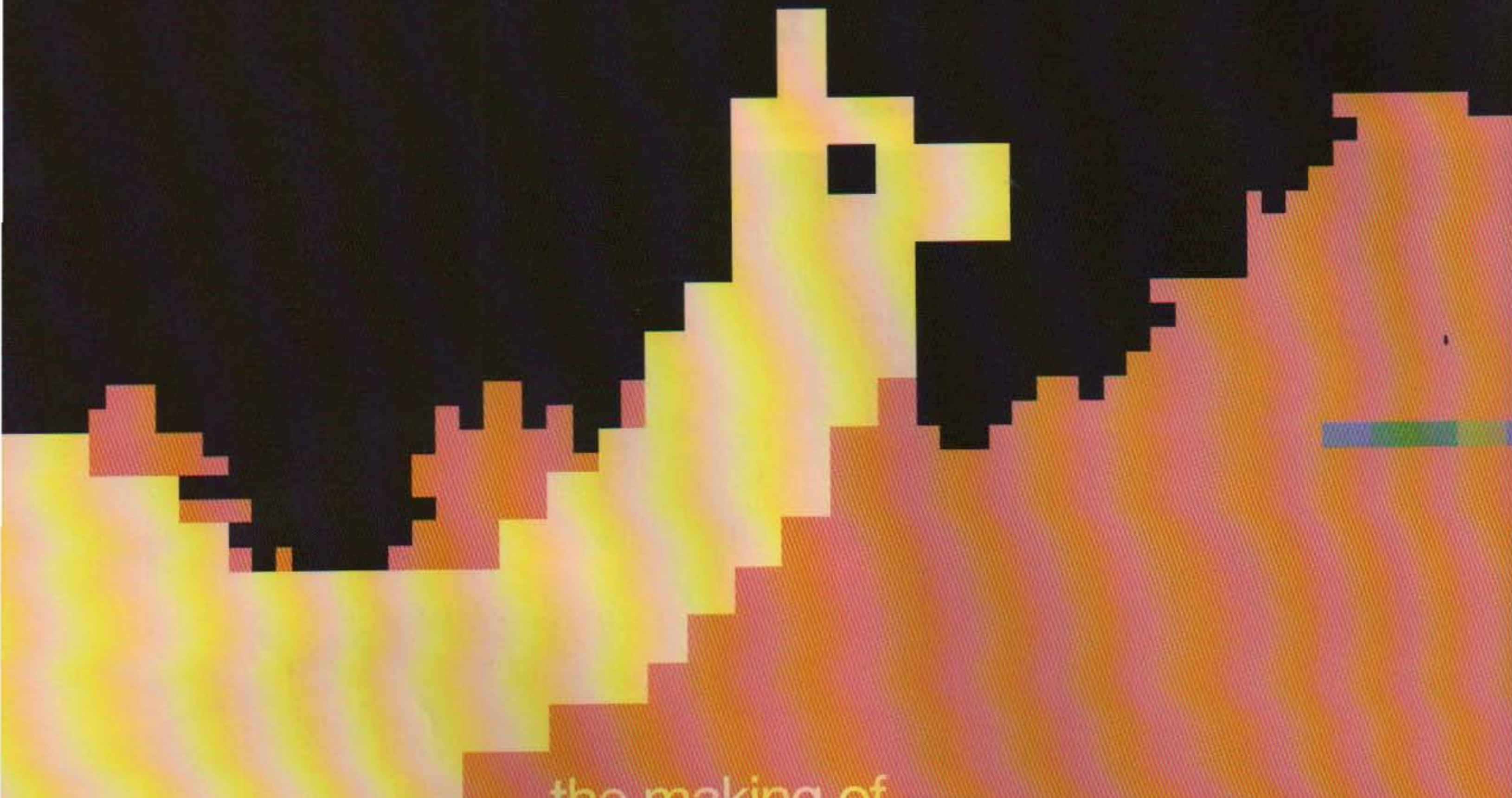








Sammy has done a good job of recreating the graphical splendour of the Neo Geo series in handheld form, but the fact that you're fighting imbecilic big sprites doesn change how disappointingly dumb they ar



the making of...

Attack of the

Created at the dawn of home computing – when even 90-fo high camels were a bit unusual – Jeff Minter's most fondly remembered games brought a touch of humour to the scene Edge goes to Wales in search of its llama-loving creator

Original format: **Commodore 64**
Publisher: **Llamasoft Software**
Developer: **Jeff Minter**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1983**



Mutant Camels

Any knowledgeable fan of the 'Star Wars' films will tell you that the mighty science fiction saga has inspired its fair share of bizarre cultural artefacts. Some are close homages, some are parodies and others are more laterally stimulated by some aspect of George Lucas' mythos. Surely one of the most surreal examples falls into this latter category and appeared almost 20 years ago: the classic videogame that was *Attack of the Mutant Camels*.

AMC was released in 1983 for the old beige warhorse, the 8bit Commodore 64. It was produced by **Jeff Minter**, known to his friends, colleagues and fans as 'the Yak' of 49 Mount Pleasant, Tadley, England. Fans knew this was his address because it was printed, endearingly, on the reverse of every copy of the *AMC* cassette box and was the epicentre of the mighty Llamasoft Software production house (and the address certainly gives you the impression it probably was just that: a house).

Minter had been inspired to create *Attack of the Mutant Camels* after reading a magazine review of the Parker Brothers' version of *The Empire Strikes Back*. That game was a console-based take on the famous AT-AT attack sequence from the second film in the original space fantasy trilogy. The review in question described the Walkers as "giant mechanical camels."

"And that just got me thinking about giant camels in general," says Minter. "Normal camels aren't that big, and so if they weren't to be robot camels then they must needs be mutant camels. And thus was born a very silly game sequence indeed."

Minter had learned game programming at a time when there wasn't really any commercial application for it, in order to amuse his mates at college. It was a couple of years later, while recovering from a serious illness, that he decided to try and sell some games.

"Going through college I had always been on a maths and physics track," he explains. "I also had an A-level in English, which was kind of an odd combination. I think I enjoyed programming so much because it embodies both the logical discipline of the scientific side of things and the ability to create whatever the hell you like from the artistic side of things."

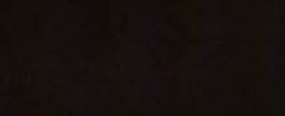
Ideal niche

Interestingly, given that his games are renowned for their imaginative, often psychedelic visuals, Minter claims little in the way of artistic prowess: "I was never good enough at drawing to get into animation or anything like that. I guess in programming I found my ideal niche, because if you can't draw you can make it up algorithmically."

The *AMC* plot involved you having to pilot your tiny but highly (well, moderately at any rate) manoeuvrable fighter craft across a scrolling, mountainous alien landscape

Attack of the Mutant Camels had you facing relentlessly marching 90-foot tall laser-spitting camels of death. Minter: "My aim is to create fun games, unpretentious games."





and against 90-foot high, neutronium-shielded, laser-spitting death camels. Repeated blasts from your laser gun would result in the weakening of the mutant camels' shields (in other words they changed colour) and their eventual explosive destruction. Obliteration of all the camels would result in a heart-stopping 'trans-sector hyperwarp' sequence requiring you to dodge speeding rockets until such time as your 'trans-spatial warp field' engaged. You'd then have to battle another legion of more aggressive mutant camels, and so on. The whole retina-blistering experience was kind of like *Defender* reimagined by Terry Gilliam.

"I hadn't yet got to grips with raster interrupts and the scroll registers, which is why the planet movement is just a chunk-rez character scroll," says Minter of the production process. "And I couldn't do rea 'Defender-movement' of the ship to save my life, which is why it behaves so anomalously if you reverse repeatedly."

Different strokes

Another problem Minter encountered resided in the differences between the US and UK versions of the Commodore 64 computer. "I had only just got one of the first C64s in the country and it was a US import model," he says. "Some things behaved differently on the US model… so the game, when played on a UK machine, had some flaws… If I remember correctly the camels' arses would fall off at the edg of the screen – the camels were made out of two sprites bolted together."

Minter's oeuvre includes many project with bizarre plots featuring sheep, camels and llamas but he has also created a number of productions where 'ruminants' generic term for our cud-chewing friends) were not the primary concern. In fact, he temporarily shelved work on *AMC* to produce a conversion of his classic *Gridrunner*, a kinetic, compulsive and extremely difficult shooter owing a big de to *Centipede*. By the time Minter began work on the more sophisticated sequel to



AMC, entitled *Revenge of the Mutant Camels*, he'd become both much happier with the wiles of the C64 and much more comfortable with the idea of working on games that were entirely his own design.

"I never really got properly to grips with the C64 until *Revenge of the Mutant Camels*," explains Minter, "by which time I could at least draw a better camel and use the scroll registers."

Revenge of the Mutant Camels reflected Minter's love of the humped ungulates by placing you in control of a fugitive mutant camel trying to evade its alien masters from the first game, the evil Zzyaxians. It was a much more elegant game than its predecessor and featured far more in terms of surreal imagery. Playing it again nowadays is like taking a trip through the cultural landscape of the early '80s, replete with red telephone boxes and CND badges, and when you die, what sounds extraordinarily like the theme tune to '80s TV sci-fi series, 'Battlestar Galactica'. And that's not even to mention the amusing postmodern schtick of having to fight both the original spaceship from *AMC* and an actual enemy character bearing the awesomely self-referential moniker, 'Manic Minter'.

Loyal fanbase

Following the demise of the original Llamasoft, in the mid-'90s Minter created *Tempest 2000*, a reinvention of the arcade classic, *Tempest*. For many, Minter's new version proved to be the only justification for owning an Atari Jaguar console. In fact, Minter has maintained a loyal fanbase throughout the period of the original Llamasoft and his subsequent endeavours, and, as the numerous amounts of Net-based cheerleading testify, many of these fans are evidently thrilled to bits with Minter's latest project, namely the recently launched gnuLlamasoft.

"I'm hoping to carve out enough of a niche doing games for PocketPC and PC and distributing them online," Minter says. "Thus far it is going okay, although I really need PPC sales to pick up if I am going to continue supporting that platform."

"I think games take themselves too seriously. Games should be fun and imbued with some kind of humour. A game should make you laugh, as well as being satisfying to play"

Interestingly Minter is critical of the somewhat anonymous nature of much contemporary game design, "You should be able to tell who created a game just by looking at it – something that is extremely rare these days. That's what I tried to do with Llamasoft back in the old days, and that's what I'm trying to do again with gnuLlamasoft."

And what about the feeling that many games are about as humorous as a 'Newsnight' profile of Bill Gates?

"I think a lot of games take themselves too seriously. Games should be fun and ideally imbued with some kind of humour," he explains. "A game should make you laugh once in a while, as well as being satisfying to play."

Reassuringly, Minter, now based in rural west Wales with a menagerie of animals, including his beloved sheep, doesn't rule out further appearances by the mutant camels. Although for those **Edge** readers wondering about the roots of his obsession with cud-chewing, hump-possessing mammals, he provides the following, vaguely unsettling explanation:

"I don't know where it comes from, only that I found camels to be attractive, for some reason," he says. "Likewise llamas. And sheep, and goats, and a lot of ungulates come to think of it."

And the philosophy behind *Attack of the Mutant Camels* and Minter's subsequent work? He explains, "Basically all I have ever done is make the games that I really want to play, and I'm just happy if enough other people want to play them as well to keep me in sheep food and curry."



Minter says that nowadays the camels look like "two men in a suit." Although draughtmanship was not his strongest point, Minter compensated with addictive gameplay and abstract imagery

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 49, September 1997

Destiny, mystery, and doubt: the tarot cards on the incovers told a story about **E**49. Destiny? **Edge**'s call for a production editor with "strong subbing and writing skills" was given some weight and urgency by the article on Sony's rise to dominance, which referred to "Pa Rappa" no less than 11 times. Mystery? The lack of rumble in the new PlayStation analogue pad caused **Edge** to go all conspiracy theory. "Repeated use of the force feedback breaks the inner components," claimed one anonymous developer, while **Edge**'s editorial perspective had it down as a price issue.

And doubt? Everywhere; over Tiger's new handheld ("Whether [*Sonic Jam*] will make the Game.com a success remains to be seen"). Over Destination Software's musical tribute *Queen: The Eye* ("Whether Destination will be able to marry the twin pressures of paying homage to Queen and presenting a title that any gamer can appreciate, whether they mourn the loss of Freddie or not, remains to be seen.") And finally, over *Panzer Dragoon Saga*: ("It's difficult to predict how such a title will be received in the west"). If only you could use Tarot to predict eBay prices...

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"It inflicts great pain and suffering on the programmers using it, without returning any significant advantages... it is a gigantic pain in the ass." John Carmack provides a summary of Microsoft's Direct3D API.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"**Edge**'s enemies mostly take the form of the descendants of the world's genetic mutations created in the now distant past." Ah, and you thought they were just whiny fanboys.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Multi-Racing Championship (N64, 7/10); *Last Bronx* (Saturn, 8/10); *Dark Earth* (PC, 8/10); *Dark Rift* (N64, 5/10); *Street Fighter Ex Plus Alpha* (PS, 8/10); *Extreme Assault* (PC, 7/10); *No Respect* (PC, 6/10); *Actua Golf 2* (PS, 7/10); *Battle Arena Toshinden 3* (PS, 6/10); *Salamander 2* (Saturn, 6/10); *Atomic Bomberman* (PC, 7/10)


1



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1. Seta's N64 modem cart, designed for board game Morita Shiogi 2. The opening spread for **Edge**'s *Panzer Dragoon Saga* coverage 3. Sir Clive makes an appearance in 'Where are they now?' 4. Masaya Matsuura, wondering how **Edge** managed to misspell PaRappa 5. Jovovich looks better in 'Resident Evil' 6. *SF EX Plus Alpha*: a new standard in obtuse naming

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, John Cook, founder of Bad Management, remembers receiving a package from Moscow





Despite receiving worldwide approbation, *Tetris* didn't appeal to Mirrorsoft's marketing staff

It's the '80s and my first week in the new job, where I am supposed to convert the experience of reviewing 20 games per week for over two years into commissioning decisions for Mirrorsoft.

There's a jiffy bag on my desk. From Moscow. I boot a wind-up PC and load it up. There's a box on the screen and shapes each made up of four cubes are falling into it. It's called *Tetris*. I get excited. "We've all been playing it until 2am – but no one in Sales and Marketing likes it," says **Pete Jones** (now at Argonaut, later to write the Z80 versions for me).

Tetris – arguably the perfect minimalist game. It has pace, drama, simplicity, complexity, elegance, it can enter your dreams; yet with all this, it came from the mind of a single person, Alexey Pajitnov.

Well, books have been written about what happened next – but that same spark of excitement, the dawning realisation that you could be looking at gaming history when you see something really special for the first time, (and then getting them to sign as a client) is what keeps me in the business.

FAQ

Edward Studden

artist, Zoonami



Unless you've been paying attention, you won't have heard of Zoonami. That's the way the developer likes it. However, its mission is to create "the finest game."

What was the first videogame you played?
Pong. The funny thing about it was I didn't think much about it. I was more impressed by the Intellivision case. I'm ashamed, but it is true.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
Atari 2600. SX I think. I had *Tank Pong* and *Defender*. *Defender* I played to death. Also it had a picture of a girl in a tight stripy t-shirt on the cover, so *Defender* got played first. But in the actual game she was reduced to a single pixel.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
A proposal for 'Saturday Superstore'. It was a competition to design your own game. The prize was a visit to some Mastertronic company. And I submitted a 20-page design document. They disqualified me because you were only supposed to use one page. But the show felt sorry for me, so they sent my design to the company. And they used my character design, which was done in pixels and everything so it was easy to lift. The end result was that the main character in *Agent X* for the Spectrum was designed by me, when I was 11. They may have thought they were doing me a favour but in truth I was heartbroken.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
Rare. A crate, which I did badly.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
About 15.

What's your favourite book, album, and film of all time?
I can't put things in a hierarchy or a top ten, really. I'll mention 'The Invisibles' by Grant Morrison. 'Superman: The Movie'. Not a literary favourite, but the build-up is excellent, although the ending is tosh. Seeing him grow up and catch a helicopter and save Lois Lane is great for a kid. I could say 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' because that was the first film I saw in a cinema just with me and my dad.

Which Website do you most regularly visit?
Probably something boring actually. Probably the BBC. No, www.zoonami.com, surely.

What game would you most like to have worked on?
... Long pause ... That is a tough one. I don't know. Maybe *Agent X*. To carry the grudge.

Of all the games you've been involved in in the past, what's your favourite, and why?
The experience of coming out of art school, and not knowing much about games and the industry and getting expert tutoring and guidance. That's something that really transformed what I was capable of and built a lot of confidence. I really enjoyed working on *Conker*. When we were working on the Dunkirk scene, the 'Saving Private Ryan' spoof, I had to work for one week listening to the sounds of gun fire, screaming and shouting. That was pretty disturbing.

"I think games need to come down in price. I think they'll go mainstream once they have the kind of price a DVD has"

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
Probably *Elite* on the Atari ST, because it's the game that I played the longest and I found it the most escapist. It had a lot of depth. Your imagination filled in the gaps. And there were a lot of gaps.

What was the last game you played, and what did you think of it?
Ocarina of Time. Yesterday. It's smaller than I remembered. It seems to shrink the more I play it. It always seemed expansive and epic, and now I'm starting to really know my way around. The creatures that populate the game are brilliant.

What stage is your current project at?
The secretive stage.

Which aspect of it do you think will impress players the most?
The secret aspect.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
I think the notion that videogames are capable of producing some of the strongest human emotions, in a much more powerful way than film or any other medium. Once videogames develop fully that promise will be realised. Also everything is constantly improving and that is exciting. Also knowing all the time you're making something that nobody has ever seen before. You can see gaps in the market and move to fill them. I think you can predict a year or two ahead what entertainment is going to be. Feeling you're part of the now of human experience rather than not, you're actually part of creating the future. Because the period is so long, you spend years on a game you have to have your mind set on producing something really new. It's a challenge because the closer you get to originality, the harder it is to judge its quality.

What disappoints you about the industry?
The price of games. It's a bit disappointing. By at least £10. I feel sorry for the mom or dad who pays £45 for a substandard game.

Whose work do you most admire?
Easily Shigeru Miyamoto and the artists at NCL.

How do you see the evolution of the current gaming platforms?
I think games need to come down in price. I think they'll go mainstream once they have the kind of price a DVD has.

Videogames: Art of Entertainment? (Discuss)
They're not art and never will be art. For two reasonably incontrovertible reasons. One, they are not created solely by artists. And two, they are not shown in galleries. Also a game would have to be created with the intention of being art.

inbox

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Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

I'm writing after reading the letter you published by Malcom Rollo (**E**111). I fully understand his feeling underwhelmed with current games and this issue, along with retrogaming is one that crops up more frequently. My story is that I'm old enough to remember when *Pong* first appeared at home. My father bought it and it was black and white with two white lines and a square ball. It blew me away, it was the first time I ever had a chance to do something other than just watch a TV. Then a well off friend got it in colour, it was brilliant. A few years later my dad bought an Acorn Electron, after 20 minutes or so (if you were lucky) you could play games with sprites. A while after that when I had left home I bought an NES with *Mario Bros*, the game was pure magic and I'd never felt so excited since that first machine. Then followed a Mega Drive, the graphics in *Sonic* were completely mindblowing, so vibrant because it was new and different.

Other games followed, *Desert Strike*, *John Madden* then *Flashback*, a game where the character looked so lifelike. I moved from a Mega Drive to Amiga 1200 where I experienced the joys of *Sensible Soccer* and *Championship Manager*. Even now with games such as *Pro Evolution Soccer*, no football game has made the impact of *Sensi*'s game.

Many other games in this time have been special. This long winded point is your first games are like your first kiss or losing your virginity, it's always special. Now I own PS2, Xbox and GameCube and with all the games I've played on these systems it gets harder for games to make me feel like that. *Crazy Taxi* on the Dreamcast and *Virtua Tennis* are two recent games like that, with *Halo* being the only one of the current releases able to achieve what many games can't. I love *Project Gotham*, but it's an evolution from *MSR* and I feel that many games are like this. *Monkey Ball* smacks you in the face, *Wave Race* doesn't. Games are now evolving and revolutionary games are few and far between. This doesn't make them bad, but if you don't accept this you will always be dissapointed. Just enjoy good games and as long as generally they improve then that is the best we can ask for.
Dave Ponsford

Malcolm Rollo made a very interesting point in **E**111, regarding his personal struggle to enjoy games as much as he once did. I am currently encountering the same problem, but I believe that it may have something to do with playing one game.

My gaming before *Deus Ex* appeared mostly involved firstperson shooters. That was because I liked the realistic, 3D graphics that these games displayed. This may seem rather shallow, but a game with unrealistic graphics is a non-starter where I am concerned. I have played a large number of FPS games since *Doom* was released in 1993, but only a few have generated the kind of atmosphere that really made me want to play. Examples of this level of gaming include *Terminator Future Shock*, *Unreal* (the first nine levels), and *Half-Life* (not including the last four levels). Then *Deus Ex* was released, and my PC gaming was transformed.

Purchasing *Deus Ex* wasn't an automatic decision. Most FPS games involve little more than running around levels and shooting enemies. The only difficulties associated with this are the number and strength of the enemies concerned. However, *Deus Ex* was an RPG. This was a game that required far more in the way of tactical decisions. Should I fight my way through, or take a more stealthy approach? Should I waste a couple of lockpicks on this storeroom door, or save them for later on? Finally, I decided to take the plunge. Maybe I was just ready for something a little more challenging than mindless shooting. What I found was a revelation. *Deus Ex* was huge, it was detailed, it was exciting… every positive aspect of gaming rolled into one neat package. Simply put, it was the best PC game that I have ever played.

And this is where the problems started. Every game that I have played since has been compared to *Deus Ex*, and every one has failed to even approach the level of detail and gameplay complexity of this majestic piece of software. In short, my level of expectation has increased. I war something more than just shooting my way to the end of a game. I want to be involved in a story tha twists and turns frequently, so that I'm not sure what's coming next. I want to be able to apply rea world thinking in the game, and then execute the solution with realistic results. In short, I want *Deus Ex II*.
Chris Low

I found myself agreeing with Malcolm Rollo's comments in his recent letter, in **E**111. As long-time player, I too am becoming bored of gaming. Like Malcolm, I've tried to explain my lack of interest but it proves hard to quantify. Perhaps the race for more impressive graphics at the expense of gameplay has left me feeling cold; I simply find games lack a hook to make me invest money and more importantly, my precious time.

Halo is a superb game, but one game does no justify a £200 console. And what do you do once you've played *Halo*, what else is there on Xbox tha I haven't played before (albeit with less flashy graphics)? And what can I say about the PC? Afte the bug-ridden messes that were *Black & White* and *Operation Flashpoint*, or the monotony of *Allied Assault*, where do I go next?

Gaming is a major investment of player time; a a 28-year-old adult there are many competing demands for my time, outside of work. I simply don't find myself playing games as I used to. Why should I play games? Where is the reward (satisfaction?), where is the hook?

Have I too, grown out of games, or has the industry just failed to captivate me with round afte round of clichéd, genre-propping games that fail t interest me? I want interesting stories with great characters. I want exciting and demanding gameplay. So many games focus on killing and death, personally I am finding these games borin is this the best the industry can come up with?

"Have I too, grown out of games, or has the industry just failed to captivate me with round after round of clichéd, genre-propping games that fail to interest me?"

Nigel Powley wrongly believes 'ten out of ten' means perfection. And he isn't too fond of some of the repetition in *Halo*. *Tetris*, too, is repetitive...



The Lionhead interview in **E**111 was interesting, at last someone with some unusual, great ideas that may bring me back to gaming.
Rob Cole

Over the past six years that I have purchased **Edge**, myself and countless other readers have found your review scores a bit severe. But I always find myself quoting your review scores as the benchmark. So? Just recently I gave in and sold my soul to Microsoft and bought an Xbox. I feel guilty every I look at my Japanese modded GameCube bought last November. And no I'm not giving up on the Cube. Nine import games on my shelf and plenty more on the horizon.

The reason I bought a dirtbox? I just had to have *Halo*. '10/10 **Edge** Magazine.' says the TV ad. A review in **E**105 that told you naff all about the game but wished you to buy it. Well I bought it. Am I disappointed? No. Is it worth the purchase of a dirtbox? Well I bought one, didn't I? Is it perfect? No. 10/10 as my mate rightly says implies that the game is perfect. Which is what your review says. This game is not perfect.

Am I the only person who felt the later levels a tad repetitive? I believe that this game is based on (however loosely) a novel. But haven't we seen these mutated alien beasts before? And those bloody face huggers. Snore. Couldn't they have given us something more. And what happened to the marines? On later levels they just disappear when you need them most to quite literally help hold back the flood. This game is not perfect.

A perfect *Halo* would have given us a step up in level to super alien. Not these virus-ridden zombies who overwhelm you, not outsmart you. A perfect *Halo* would have been to try and keep a band of marines alive and with you at all times. The amount of times I have stood next to a dead soldier or downed lifeboat with full health bar and medikits at my feet and tried to will my men to partake in the life on offer, just to have them stand around waiting to die. I want to keep them alive but will they help me, or themselves? Will they fak.

A perfect *Halo* would have allowed you to do this. Sacrifice your health and save your men to fight another battle. If a soldier dies in combat he dies, but at least give him the opportunity to turn down much needed health when available. Minor niggles? Maybe. But a perfect game should have no niggles at all. Should not elicit sighs of disappointment as you enter the next level to be confronted by a million more deformed foes. It also would have been nice to have some good old *Perfect Dark* stats to check back on at will.

I'll say it again, this game is not perfect. And for once I can say that **Edge** has overrated a game. 10/10? Perhaps *Halo 2*. I just hope it isn't going to be *Return of the Flood*. *Halo* 9/10, there's still room for improvement.
Nigel Powley

Black & White is a mirror, but it reflects the vanity of its producer rather than any hidden truth about its user. More GUI than game, there are documents, but no applications. Some ugly potato people wander about. Do I care that they are in jeopardy?

The addition of a 102-key keyboard does not help control a camera which both distracts and detracts from the action. If I am a god then where is my grace?

With no persona to adopt but a lifeless hand I am expected to explore a space limited only by the scope of my own imagination. Yet, its beauty is not enough to compensate for a lack of drama. Where is the momentum in something essentially non-linear? If it is a simulation then I should start off with some power. If it is a game then I should feel more confident on completing an objective.

Why isn't the camera object-oriented? Spot a villager in the distance and one click would be enough to fly over to it and continue to track as he climbed the hills for wood. It should be more of a puzzle to tell what the villagers want. Give me two creatures and one could care and the other attack. I would then have to worry about keeping them apart. I shouldn't require worship. I would start with a reservoir of power from which I could experiment and this would recharge at a gradually diminishing rate. Eventually I would realise that I needed to inspire and delegate in order to boost my recovery rate. I would gain the miracles of a defeated god and could then teach the village to build fishing boats.

Fifteen minutes after I receive my cow I should understand its volition and feel my actions have influenced it. A few differently inflected moos are not enough. It should talk.

The island conflict would start when it decided to wander off. *Black & White* would contrive to have it meet a creature belonging to another god. I would hear them talk and have the chance to go after it with the leash before there was any premature bloodshed.

I have yet to play a game that is truly next-gen, and tired of the experiments. I feel impotent rather than immersed.
Siddhartha Guatama

I read with interest your article in **E**109 on videogames being taken seriously by the media. There is, however, one thing that bothers me when the 'gaming as art' debate crops up. It appears that most advocates of the medium as an art form would simply like the gaming industry to be more like Hollywood. While this kind of acceptance would undoubtedly be good for the industry in a financial sense, I fear that the artistic side of games would actually suffer were this to happen.

You only need to take a look at some of the films coming out of Hollywood these days to see what I mean; films such as 'The Mummy Returns' and 'X-Men' are just giant special effects advertisements, released with the sole intention of raking in cash for the studio. Hollywood was never really about art. It is, and always has been, about money. While the games industry is slowly going down this route (and in this sense, there was more artistic merit in gaming during the days of the Spectrum, when most games were created by one man alone in his room), I feel that the videogame

"Fifteen minutes after I receive my cow I should understand its volition and feel my actions have influenced it. A few differently inflected moos are not enough. It should talk"



Unlike your typical 14-year-old, Gareth Bird shows impeccable gaming taste and can genuinely claim responsibility for increasing the sales of *SMB*

industry should remain slightly underground – can you imagine Jonathan Ross reviewing games ("the gwaphics are twuly lush, with no dishernable dwop in fwamerate..."), or a gaming Oscars ceremony, with Shigeru Miyamoto wearing an expensive designer suit and crying uncontrollably as he receives his award?

Games are an art form, yes, but if the industry were to go down the Hollywood route, then the gaming public would most likely suffer as a result. Not every film that comes out of Hollywood is automatically a work of art, most are simply created to make money. For every 'Gladiator' or 'Saving Private Ryan', there are ten 'Star Wars: Attack of Lucas' Beard' rip-offs. If gaming is to truly become an art form, the industry should concentrate more on the quality of the games it is producing and less on money or what the sensationalist tabloid press are saying.
Benjamin Manch

Looking at the pictures of *Doom III*, I'm sure my reaction was the same of many others, that of jaw-dropping awe. But as games look more and more like photos (or at least like 'The Spirits Within'), you have to ask yourself why? What is the point? As I remember when 'The Spirits Within' was released, one of the many criticisms aimed at it was that with this increased sense of realism, it lost a lot of its soul. Another was if they looked as good as they did why not use actors? There didn't seem any reason for the (fantastic) effects other than fact that the film came from a game, and therefore it needs computer animation.

If we refer this to games we are skirting dangerously towards the type of style that was in *Mortal Kombat*. Looking back at *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter* I find the style in the latter far more attractive than the realism in the former. Likewise looking at *Soldier of Fortune II* and *Tron 2.0* the retro-futuristic nature of *Tron* looks far more interesting.

What I'm looking forward to is a time when photorealism has been achieved and we can all forget about it. A time like when after the Renaissance, the Dalis and Picassos will come out of the woodwork and give us something interesting to look at. I'm tired of real life. Give me something new. UGA can ignore this letter.
Jason Scott

Regarding your prescreen of *The Lord of the Rings, the Two Towers* (**E**112), specifically the leader comment: "EA seeks to banish memories of the disappointing cinematic outing..."

Disappointing? In what way? Most people who saw the film, myself included, were far from disappointed. In fact, I didn't read a bad review of the film in any publication that I saw (newspapers, film magazines, Internet reviews), nor did I speak to anyone who was in any way disappointed. I'm an active contributor to a number of movie newsgroups, and only found very occasional negative comments – on the whole it was hailed as a huge success.

I also count myself as a fan of the trilogy of books, once thought un-filmable, and was delighted to see just how closely Peter Jackson was able to keep his film to Tolkein's original vision.

Your comments baffled me. Disappointing to whom you do not say. I can only assume you are referring to yourselves, in which case, you're disappointed on your own. I suggest that in future **Edge** does what it does so very well, and sticks to covering computer entertainment, and related media. Leave the film reviews to people who know what they are talking about, you clearly do not.
Ted Forsyth

Not so long ago, many people thought the world was flat. You should know by now that **Edge** doesn't slavishly follow (wrong) opinion.

As for the movie, it featured hammy acting, a stuttering, incomprehensible narrative structure and some fairly average special effects.

As an aside, since it's not important in evaluating the film's cinematic worth, it also spectacularly failed to evoke the authenticity with which Tolkien created a fantasy medieval sociology.

We'd like to leave the film reviews to people who know what they're talking about, but apparently there aren't many.

I regularly see people stating that 14-year-old gamers all buy fanboy magazines, would rather buy Same-as-Last-Year 2002 or Shoot-Shoot-Loads-of-Blood-No-Substance 2, and listen to trashy 'Nu-metal' bands.

Well I'm 14, and I don't buy fanboy magazines, I buy **Edge**. I hate to see people quoting magazines which are obviously over rating. I'd prefer *Ico* or *Rez* over *Fifa 2002* or something like *Red Faction*. I hate to see friends ignoring *Ico* because the boy looks stupid.

At least I've convinced about five people to get *Super Monkey Ball* (none were disappointed).

So anyway, the point is: before anyone goes writing off teenagers as know-nothings, remember there are a few who can defy the system.
Gareth Bird

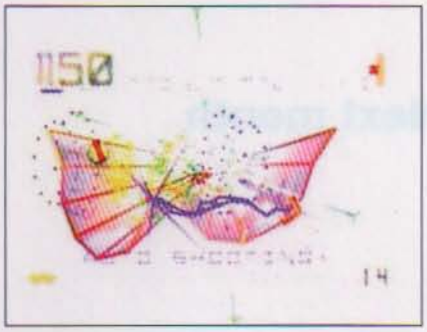
Okay, I'm getting just a little bit wound up now by the people who keep writing in, moaning that they can't identify with the main character in the game they're playing, because he's either a different race/different gender/different sexual preference, etc.

I'm a 20-something white heterosexual male. So I guess I can 'identify' with mostly all of the main player charcters. I don't. When I play as Snake I don't feel like that's me snapping those necks and sculking around the ship, I don't feel like I'm Ryo collecting knick knacks and solving a Scooby Doo mystery and certainly don't see myself in Voldo's leather suit kicking the shinola out of Taki. I just play the damn game. I couldn't care less if the main character was a different race, sex, etc. I just play the game regardless.

And enjoy it, unless it's by 3DO.
Adam Lockyer

"I suggest **Edge** sticks to covering computer entertainment and related media. Leave the film reviews to people who know what they are talking about, you clearly do not"





Republic fails to win over some of **Edge**'s forumites while Jeff Minter is keen to port the fabulous *T3K* to the GC – let's hope someone out there is listening

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (www.futureforums.co.uk/edge/)

Subject: **Republic: The future of... Something**
Poster: **Devilheart Storygun**
E112 raises, in its one-line preview of *Republic*'s E3 showing, a question which I'd been wondering for a while now: will the game actually appeal to today's gamers?

The way I see it, the gamers who are most likely to be interested in a sprawling socio-political sim rife with micromanagement are also the ones least likely to own a PC with enough gaming rig grunt to run it. the much-vaunted infinite polygon engine is all well and good, but strategy gamers are happy with spreadsheets and isometric grids for a reason – it runs on their machines.

After all the time and money that's been funnelled into *Republic*, even if it does everything hyped on the tin, surely it's still far too much of a niche game to recoup its development costs. So why has it been left to run wild? So Hassabis can say, "Isn't my team clever"?

Are these wildly ambitious, idiosyncratic titles the next step in gaming, or are they setting a dangerous precedent by hoovering up funding and drowning out other games with their hype? Should we be encouraging 'hardcore games for hardcore gamers', or the simpler (not necessarily less innovative) titles that appeal to hardcore, to casual, and to your mum?

Poster: **Goose**
I agree with you, with the exception of the power of the engine the game is running on, it just doesn't appeal to me at all. It just sounds dull. Unless they're going to let you influence voters in the style of *GTAIII*, I can't see this doing that well.

Like I just said in another post, surely they must be so tired of working on the game now and what after all that work it gets average reviews not so much based no the game but on the ideas and themes of the game?

You could have the most beautifully rendered house, with full detail showing even the strands in the carpet, but if all the idea of the game is to go from room to room watching the paint dry on the walls, it just ain't gonna appeal to anyone.

Poster: **Devilheart Storygun**
Strong feelings on it aside, let's say *Republic* is an absolutely amazing game – within the boundaries of what it promised, ie it's an omnicient control strategy game in a faceless communist state. Will it still be a lot of money and effort put towards tilting at windmills?

Whether because we're a fickle lot or because there aren't that many of us, software that relies on the hardcore/experimental crowd historically doesn't make its money back. If there is a place for games that do everything in a way that's never been done before, I'm wondering if it shouldn't be on a smaller scale, aiming to court modest success.

The danger of *Republic*, or Molyneux's reinventing the wheel titles, is that they appeal to people who like Molyneux's games, game academics, and American journalists, and that's it. I'm all for aiming high, but if it's over the heads of three-quarters of your target audience, what then?

Poster: **Sid**
If it's as good as Demis Habitat (sic) says it is, then there will be something in there for everyone. Even people who don't like driving games can see just how good *Gran Turismo* is.

Poster: **DangerM**
I have no idea what this game is about, but if it involves communism (which I'm assuming it does from its title) I'm sure it will be fun.

Subject: ***Tempest 3000* for GameCube?**
Poster: **Kenshi**
I was checking out some info about *Tempest 3000* (a game I really want to play), and during my Webhunting I came across a thread on Llamasoft's Web forums.

On it, Jeff Minter said that he would love to do a version for the GameCube if some publisher asked him to do it.

Someone sign this game up please!

Subject: **Stretching a franchise**
Poster: **sordel**
We've had Mario in a karting game, a golf game, a tennis game, an RPG and *three* (soon to be four) party games, but the question remains as to when these franchises reach their natural elastic limits. Any takers for a Mario FPS along the lines of *Soldier of Fortune* for 'body-part context sensitive' attacks on Yoshi and Peach? How about a *Silent Hill* party compendium? A Lara Croft bemani game (or is that what *Space Channel 5* was?)? Ecco the dolphin as an unlockable character in *Tekken*? *Solid Snake Karting*?

Poster: **weaponkiller**
Solid Snake Pro Skater.
Wait...

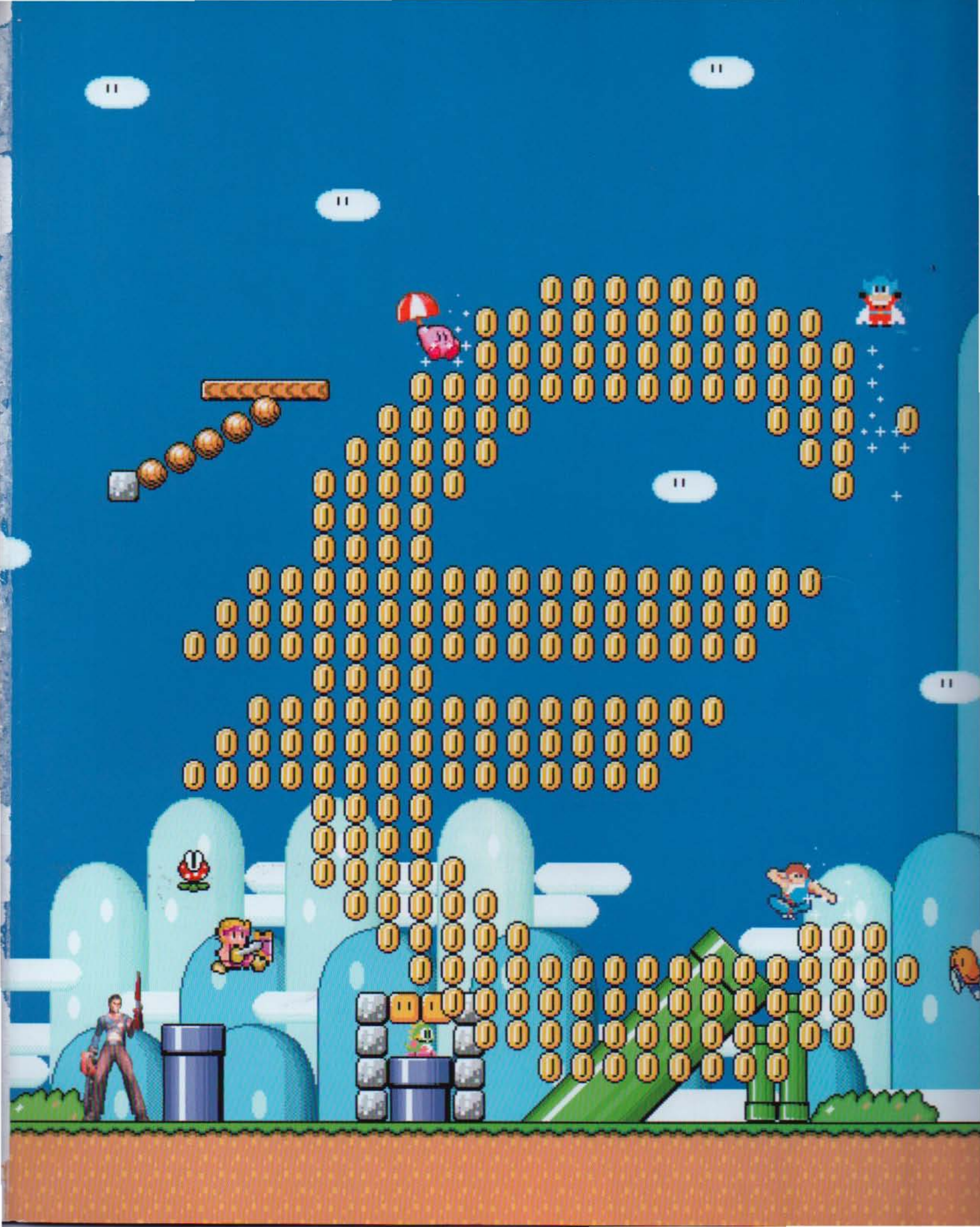
Poster: **Shinji**
Where in the world is *Samba de Amigo*?

"Republic's much-vaunted infinite polygon engine is all well and good, but strategy gamers are happy with spreadsheets and isometric grids for a reason – it runs on their machines"

Next month

(apologies for last month's premature irrigation)





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